

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 21 April 2021 commencing at 1.00 pm and finishing at 2.25 pm.

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Michael Waine – in the Chair

Councillor John Howson (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Ted Fenton
Councillor Mrs Anda Fitzgerald-O'Connor
Councillor Jeannette Matelot
Councillor Gill Sanders
Councillor Emma Turnbull

By Invitation: Mrs Carole Thomson, Oxfordshire Governors' Association.

Officers: Director for Children's Services, Kevin Gordon, Deputy Director of Education, Hayley Good, Deborah Bell, Kim James and Allyson Milward; Deborah Miller (Law & Governance).

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 are attached to the signed Minutes.

44/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS (Agenda No. 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale, Cabinet Member for Education and Cultural Services and Mr Donald McEwan, Council of Oxfordshire Teachers' Association (COTO).

45/21 MINUTES (Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2021 were approved and signed as an accurate record of the Meeting subject to a number of typos to be signed off with the Chairman.

Matters Arising

Minute 41/21

Councillor John Howson queried whether there was an update available on how many schools cooked by Gas. In response, Ms Milward responded that they were only aware of the split and number of schools that used gas rather than electricity for those schools that used the OCC School Catering Service, which was 59 Primary Schools and 1 Secondary School. Within those schools there was currently around a 50/50 split of Gas and Electricity. The County Council had a Replacement Equipment Program which the 35 Maintained schools were automatically part of (although all schools could receive advice or help with procurement of larger items). Currently, there was no program to change gas to electric and it was usually changed on a 'like for like basis'.

Minute 39/21

Carole Thomson noted that the School Maintenance List had not yet gone in the schools' news and queried if any further thought had been given to the dissemination of the information.

Ms Milward confirmed that it had not yet been put in the schools' news as she had been waiting for confirmation on the funding stream by the DfE. She was in discussions with Property Services about increasing their presence on 'Schools Insight' on the Website to give more information about who to go to about issues, together with listing helplines and services.

The Chairman expressed the need for the list to be kept up to date.

46/21 THANKS TO MEMBERS RETIRING FROM THE COUNCIL (Agenda No.)

The Committee paid tribute and thanked those members sitting on the Education Scrutiny Committee who would be retiring from the Council in May, Councillor Gill Sanders, councillor Emma Turnbull and Councillor Anda Fitzgerald O'Connor.

47/21 UPDATE ON RETURN TO SCHOOL (Agenda No. 5)

The Committee had requested to receive an update on the impact of COVID-19 on Education and Oxfordshire Schools. Accordingly, the Corporate Director of Children's Services, Kevin Gordon and the Deputy Director for Education, Hayley Good attended the meeting to give a presentation on the current situation following the return to school in March, a copy of which is attached to the signed copy of the Minutes.

The Corporate Director for Education, Kevin Gordon reported that a key priority had been attendance and to ensure children came back to school after the latest period of Lockdown. The Government had been monitoring attendance which allowed officers to do a comparison against the National picture. The overall attendance rate across the board had been above the National average and they were very pleased with the secondary school attendance rate. He believed that it showed that parents had confidence in Oxfordshire Schools.

Special school attendance was also good but had been affected by illness and 'bubble closures' due to the complex needs of the children. Officers had carried out a lot of work around covid support to reduce the need for bubble closures. Additional work had also been carried out to help children on EHCP return to school. The data from that morning was as follows:

- Overall daily attendance – 94.6%
- Primary - 97.5%
- Secondary - 91.3%
- Special - 89.8%
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Overall attendance rate had dropped slightly from Monday (probably more as a consequence of more schools opening on Tuesday). Interestingly attendance rate at primary schools had increased (the decrease was at secondary and special schools). There were currently 25 children self-isolating, compared to over 1000 in January and only 5 children were positive for Covid. Currently there were no staff with Covid or self-isolating.

In relation to Free School Meals, he reported that they had just received some funding announcements from Central Government about the Covid Support Grant. The grant had to be used on Free School Meals, but Oxfordshire along with many other authorities had decided to use some of the funding to provide Free School Meals over the Holiday Period (Half Term). There was no funding for this locally, so they were waiting to see whether any further provision would be forthcoming to provide free school meals over the Summer Holidays.

He further reported on the Holiday Activity Programme which ran over the Easter Holidays which also included a meal for Children as well as some Social Education around food and nutrition. 4537 places had been available across Oxfordshire for the Easter break. The provision had been set up quickly, but had gone very well, they had received a lot of positive feedback. Planning for Summer Provision was now underway, with plans to increase the scale and reach of the provision including liaising with partners and the voluntary sector, with the hope to get the provision closer to the 10 – 12 thousand mark.

The Chairman questioned whether the partners included district Councils. The Director confirmed that they ran them together with the districts and that a steering group pulled all the various strands together.

He further reported on the social media Youth Mental Wellbeing campaign, which members had received a recent briefing on. The Campaign had three core objectives which were: reaching out to children who felt isolated; were feeling anxious or had trouble sleeping – the target had been set for ten thousand hits on the campaign webpage – they had achieved 100,000 hits. They were now looking at doing other similar campaigns to reach children and parents and also looking at how that was followed through into increased service take up within those services that provided support, particularly for older teenagers with emotional mental health and wellbeing issues. There would be a massive focus going forward on children's well-being, the issues were there before but the Pandemic had impacted young people further.

Carole Thomson questioned what the CAMS waiting list was looking like currently, as she was receiving negative feedback from Governors around long waiting times. In response, the Director reported that they had a single point of contact into their child/adolescent mental services. For too long there had been a reliance on clinical interventions through the CAMS service as being the only provision that was available, so they were trying to spread the reach and look at children's emotional mental health and wellbeing across the continuum. Every CAMS service across the County had a waiting list and always had. CAMS was funded to carry out a role with a limited group of children with particular needs, with a threshold. There was a need to look at children's emotional and mental wellbeing across a much broader spectrum. He was undertaking lots of conversations across the County to cause a shift in thinking, as it was not the sole responsibility of health colleagues, but rather the responsibility of every adult who comes to work with young people.

Through the pandemic, they ran a very successful DfE funded programme developed by Anna Freud (Train the Trainer Programme) which was about providing specialist training, input and sharing knowledge with schools staff about how to identify and provide lower levels of emotional and mental health and wellbeing support to pupils. This was done through delivery, training, webinars and that translated into an increase in overall confidence and capabilities for school staff in feeling more informed and equipped to deal with situations. Over 127 people attended from schools & charities across the county.

Deborah Bell, Head of Learner Engagement commented that one of the main benefits of the programme was that it had been rolled at pace, with sort notice Whitehall money. They had an ambition to broaden the audience and had been given the opportunity to create legacy resources, so that once schools were in a position to address the training need and awareness, they had the opportunity to do that.

Kevin Gordon commented that this would become the new way of working and a key part of the teacher's tool kit and support. It would not be just teachers, they had plans for a scaling up and rolling out an emotional and mental health and well-being training and support to all children's practitioners across the County. The Pandemic had shown that could do things at pace and scale and equip people with the skills they needed.

The Chairman commented that it had been a very positive piece of work and had underlined what could be done in terms of capabilities with training and support. Kevin Gordon commented that they were now re-grouping and preparing for the next stages of the Government's roadmap. They now needed to be preparing for the 'new normal' looking at how children had been impacted by the Pandemic, whose education will have suffered, despite all the excellent work schools had put in to provide on-line education and support. They needed to address future needs, which were not just about education, attainment and learning, but were about the person as a whole.

Councillor Emma Turnbull welcomed the attendance figures, but asked whether the Director could comment on those children who were not attending and queried whether any analysis had been undertaken to determine whether it was particular sections of the community who were struggling with getting back to school. In response Kevin Gordon commented that normal figures for Primary School

attendance was around 95-96% (or slightly below), therefore there was not a big group of children who were not attending as levels currently were normal.

Deborah Bell explained that now and pre-pandemic it had been identified that children who were struggling to attend were on the autistic spectrum. Many children who were on the spectrum had enjoyed the lesser stimulus of being at home, where they had previously been struggling with being hyper-alert in a school setting. This was not unique to Oxfordshire. There was a piece of work which had been put together by the education psychologists which schools could draw on when supporting children on the autistic spectrum. There was also the communication and interaction service which was aligned to support that cohort.

She was also currently undertaking some analysis on children who were overseas and were possibly stuck overseas due to parents can't or won't pay to quarantine in a hotel. This was something not experienced before and presented a challenge which they were working their way through. This was also a National issue.

Councillor John Howson commented that he would hope those children stranded would be able to use on-line learning and queried whether the DfE had made provision for children who were quarantining in hotels who might not have their own internet access. Kevin Gordon undertook to take this up with the DfE. He also commented that they could work with schools to have laptops couriered to hotels in those circumstance. Deborah Bell commented that guidance had been sent out to schools encouraging them to stay in touch with those families and expressing the importance of not taking the off roll.

The Chairman thanked officers for their presentation.

48/21 REFLECTION ON PROGRESS OVER THE YEAR/ADMINISTRATION (Agenda No. 6)

The Committee had before it a list of issues that had been considered over the last year as follows:

February 2020

Improving Educational Outcomes

A strategic review is being undertaken on how Oxfordshire County Council and key stakeholders, including settings, schools, Trusts, Diocesan Authorities and parents can all contribute to further improve education outcomes for young people in Oxfordshire. This review is commissioned by Lucy Butler, Director for Children, Education and Families.

As part of this review, the Committee's view and opinions on the document 'Improving Education Outcomes – a strategic review' are sought.

Our aim is to develop joint priorities which all stakeholders can support and work towards achieving. Consultation is essential to develop an effective local school improvement system which is fit for purpose, led by schools and multi-academy trusts, yet with the active engagement of key strategic partners including Oxfordshire County Council.

The Management of Changing Rolls in Oxfordshire Schools

Members of Scrutiny Committee received an update on population trends affecting the provision of education services for children and young people in the county at its meeting on 4 September 2019. The aims and objectives of a strategy to meet changing demand and promote sustainability for schools is set out in the report.

Aims

- a) Ensure sufficient places in mainstream schools for Oxfordshire's growing population.
- b) Ensure sufficient provision for children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities, not only to meet population growth, but also related to changing policy, practice and incidence of specific needs.
- c) Ensure sufficient Alternative Provision.
- d) Support Oxfordshire's schools to respond to changes in demand, both down as well as up.

Objectives

- a) Monitor demographic changes and housing growth in order to inform annual pupil forecasts.
- b) Plan for new schools and expansions of existing schools.
- c) Identify emerging spare building capacity which could be reallocated to other uses.
- d) Provide guidance to schools on maintaining their affordability/sustainability.

Alternative Provision Commissioning Progress Update

Education Scrutiny Committee has requested an update on the Recommissioning of Alternative Provision for children and schools in Oxfordshire.

Educational Attainment Working Group Report

The report is the result of a deep dive by the Education Scrutiny Committee, as set out in its Forward Plan of work. The Committee formed a working group to take the deep dive forward, which met with key officers in the Education Service and visited four secondary schools to learn about good practice and innovation in teaching disadvantaged children.

This report sets out why attainment (and progress), particularly of disadvantaged children, was chosen as a deep dive topic, what examples of good practice in education of disadvantaged pupils at secondary schools the working group learned about, and sets out the Working Group's conclusions for officers, Education Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet Member for Education and Cultural Services. The Education Service is beginning the development of a comprehensive 3-year Education Strategy for Oxfordshire. This report is therefore presenting the findings of the deep dive investigation, and the Working Group's conclusions in the interim, ahead of this important scheme of work.

In Year Fair Access Policy Update

An update on the implementation and outcomes of the revised In Year Fair Access Policy (IYFAP) has been requested by Education Scrutiny Committee. In Year Fair Access protocols with schools are required under the terms of the statutory School Admissions Code 2014. This is to afford a mechanism whereby children requiring a school place outside normal admissions rounds, where local places may not be available or when the child has additional vulnerabilities, can be offered a school place.

The protocol is designed to ensure a fair distribution of non-placed children across all schools. In Year Fair Access protocols must be designed in collaboration with representative school leaders and agreed by the majority. 100% agreement is not required for the IYFAP to be valid and lawful.

Education Achievement and Attainment in Oxfordshire and its Localities' Schools

This Annual Education Performance Report at key stage 4 gives a summary and overall analysis of key outcomes and progress measures.

Ofsted and Oxfordshire Academies.

The Deputy Director of Education, Chris Hilliard will give a verbal update outlining recent discussions with Ofsted.

A Learner Engagement Strategy for Oxfordshire

This Learner Engagement Strategy has been co-produced by key stake holders and partners engaged in optimising the inclusion in education of all Oxfordshire's statutory school aged children. The purpose is to ensure that children access their full educational entitlement to enable them to thrive as adults and fully participate in the economic, learning, personal and social life of Oxfordshire.

The Committee will receive an update from the Children's, Education and Families Director team on the impact of Covid-19 on learner engagement and the current situation in education more widely.

Update on the Impact of work on Reducing Exclusions

Exclusions in Oxfordshire have been a cause for concern to Members, Officers, Parents, the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Board and Children's Trust for several years. Education Scrutiny Committee commenced a deep dive investigation into the issues in 2018. Accordingly, Education Scrutiny Committee has requested an update briefing on the current position of School Exclusions in Oxfordshire.

School Exclusions in Oxfordshire

The Committee will receive a briefing on School Exclusion data in Oxfordshire.

September 2020

Changes to SEND High Needs Top Up Funding Arrangements for 2020/21

On 15 September 2020, Cabinet will consider a report on SEND High Needs Funding and will be recommended to approve a one-off change to the funding formula for top up payments for secondary schools for the academic year 2020/21. The SEND High Needs Funding report and proposals will be published on 7 September 2020.

The Education Scrutiny Committee is invited to consider the information and proposals contained in the report and comment upon them. These comments will be published as an addendum to the SEND High Needs Funding report and taken into consideration by Cabinet in approving the recommendation at the meeting on 15 September 2020.

September (23rd)

Covid-19 Update

The Committee have requested to receive an update on the impact of COVID-19 on Education and Oxfordshire Schools. Accordingly, Corporate Director of Children's Services, Kevin Gordon and the Deputy Director for Education, Hayley Good will attend the meeting to give a verbal update on the current situation.

Update on Alternative Provision (AP) commissioning arrangements

Education Scrutiny Committee has requested an update on the Recommissioning of Alternative Provision for children and schools in Oxfordshire. This follows the update provided to Education Scrutiny Committee on 1st February 2020 and papers provided to Schools Forum lastly on 17th June 2020 for information.

Performance Update on Education Health & Care Plans in Oxfordshire

To receive a report on ECHP process and performance including a focus on Exclusions/Elective Home Education/Part time timetable and on the Early Intervention Service.

The Education Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to note the progress made in relation to Education Health and Care Plans for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

November

Update on Special Educational Needs in Oxfordshire

The Education Scrutiny Committee has requested an update on the analysis of SEND and provision in Oxfordshire, together with the emerging strategy for

implementing a transformative approach to supporting our children and young people with SEND.

The Education Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to note developments to date since September 2020, in order to transform the provision of education, health and care services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Vulnerable Learners

To receive a presentation from the Head of the Virtual School on the Virtual school, celebrating children in care and their educational achievements.

Teacher Training Recruitment

To receive a verbal report from Oxfordshire Teaching Schools Alliance on recruitment onto initial teacher training placements and the capacity of the workforce.

Admission Scheme

To receive a verbal update from the Head of Access to Learning on fair access and referrals to the Secretary of State.

February 2021

Covid 19 Update

The Committee have requested to receive an update on the impact of COVID-19 on Education and Oxfordshire Schools. Accordingly, Corporate Director of Children's Services, Kevin Gordon and the Deputy Director for Education, Hayley Good will attend the meeting to give a verbal update on the current situation.

As part of the update, the Head of Learner Engagement, Deborah Bell will provide the Committee with an update on the Reintegration Timetable.

Update on Special Educational Needs in Oxfordshire

The report outlines the developments since November 2020 in transforming SEND services in Oxfordshire.

The Education Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to note developments to date since November 2020, in order to transform the provision of education, health and care services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Children, Education & Families Capital Programme

The Committee have requested to receive an update on the delivery of the Children Education & Families Capital Programme including the additional school places successfully delivered in 2020 and the additional school places the council plans to deliver in 2021 and 2022.

Educational Attainment in Secondary Schools

The Committee have requested to receive an update on Educational Attainment in Secondary Schools. Accordingly, the Deputy Director for Education, Hayley Good and the Head of Learning and School Improvement, Kim James will attend the meeting to give a verbal update on the current data available.

Zero Carbon Agenda for Schools Buildings

The Committee have requested to receive an update on what is happening in relation to school buildings in light of the Council's agreed commitment to Climate Change, including the capital programme for new schools/retro fitting of existing schools and to receive an update on whether school transport vehicles are being looked at in terms of pollution. Accordingly, the Head of Access to Learning, Allyson Milward will attend the meeting to give a verbal update on the current data available.

Elective Home Education

The Committee have requested to receive an update on Elective Home Education and the Oxfordshire situation. Accordingly, the Deputy Director for Education, Hayley Good and the Head of Learner Engagement, Deborah Bell will attend the meeting to give a verbal update on the current situation.

The Chairman reflected on the issues and excellent work that had been considered by the Committee over the past year. He queried whether the Learner Engagement Strategy was still current and live. Deborah Bell confirmed that it was.

Councillor Gill Sanders requested that the issue of ensuring sufficient provision for children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities, not only to meet population growth, but also related to changing policy, practice and incidence of specific needs was undertaken and monitored by the Committee in the future and also that the High Needs top up funding arrangements be carefully monitored going forward and that the Committee look at the overall funding in this area. The Director for Children's Services welcomed the suggestion of on-going Scrutiny in the area of SEND. He reported that they were expecting the National SEND Review to report in June. It was unlikely that there would be any central funding to bridge the current gap in Oxfordshire. Sufficiency of special provision, proportionately what they needed and how that could be provided in mainstream settings would be a key issue for the Committee.

Councillor John Howson agreed that SEND was an important issue going forward and reported that the DfE had reached some limited agreements with a small number of local authorities regarding the 'overhang' in limbo in reserves and he hoped that the whole country would be treated the same.

The Chairman commented that the Meetings with the Regional School Commissioner and Ofsted was an important area for the Committee to maintain in the future.

Councillor John Howson commented that at a recent Oxford Localities Meetings they had received a presentation from turning point. During the presentation, the presenter had referred to the work that the Education Scrutiny Committee had been doing in terms of the investigations carried out into attendance and exclusions, and specifically the work of getting schools to look at why they were excluded children at risk and reducing the level of Exclusions. He thought that a tribute from an outside body to this Committee's work should be noted.

The Chairman thanked the Committee for their comments which would inform the next item.

49/21 SUGGESTIONS AND IDEAS FOR THE NEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
(Agenda No. 7)

This item had been placed on the Agenda to provide an opportunity for the Committee to discuss how Education Scrutiny might look in the future.

The Chairman commented that a number of issues had come to light in the previous discussions of the Committee for areas that the new Committee might wish to consider in the future. Following discussion, the Committee put forward the following list of items for the new Committee's consideration:

- The whole area of SEND and SEND funding;
- The Management of Changing School Roles;
- The Demography of school places across the County, together with the National Funding Formula and how that interacts for schools with diminishing or small numbers;
- Alternative Provision Commissioning;
- Zero Carbon Agenda;
- Maintaining the Meeting with the Regional School Commissioner and Ofsted;
- Parental choice and parental preference to lead to shift in parents thinking (school sustainability, transport, inclusion);
- The impact on Young People who had been out of school for a long period of time, link between absence to attainment;
- Encouraging children into more physical activity.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing