

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Tuesday, 14th July, 2015.

Present:- Councillors Abe, Bal, Brooker, Cheema, Matloob, Morris, Pantelic and Rana

Education Voting Co-opted Members

James Welsh (Catholic Diocese of Northampton)

Education Non-Voting Co-opted Members

Jo Rockall (Secondary school teacher representative)

Maggie Stacey (Head teacher representative)

PART 1

1. Declaration of Interest

Cllr Bal declared his daughter's employment with Slough Borough Council (SBC). Cllr Brooker declared his daughter's attendance at Burnham Park Academy and his position as Governor at Churchmead School. Cllr Morris declared his stepson's attendance at Beechwood School, his stepdaughter's attendance at East Berkshire College, his position as Vice Chair of Baylis Court and his position as Vice Chair of the Transition Board at Godolphin Infants School.

2. Election of Chair

The nomination of Councillor Bal was moved and seconded. There being no other nominations it was:-

Resolved - That Councillor Bal be appointed Chair of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel for the municipal year 2015 – 16.

3. Election of Vice Chair

The nomination of Councillor Abe was moved and seconded. There being no other nominations it was:-

Resolved - That Councillor Abe be appointed Vice Chair of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel for the municipal year 2015 – 16.

4. Minutes of the Meeting held on 15th April 2015

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting on 15th April 2015 were approved as an accurate record.

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5. Member Questions

No members' questions were received prior to the meeting.

6. School places

The Panel received an update on the current situation in terms of demand, the plans currently in progress to resolve issues concerning demand, the financial implications of these plans and possible issues which may arise in the future. The Panel had previously been given oversight of the principles behind SBC's strategy for school places. This strategy had been amended when SBC undertook longer-term predictions in December 2013; these estimated that there would be a shortfall of 15 forms of entry at Primary level and 38 at Secondary. Since this prediction, SBC had worked with local schools to meet these future pressures. The extension of existing schools and the creation of new schools was one method of ameliorating the situation; the recent creation of free schools had assisted in this.

In terms of Primary Schools, the demand was close to being satisfied with bulge classes and new permanent forms of entry (either through new schools or the expansion of existing schools) adopted. At present, it was not anticipated that further expansion would be required; however, this may be reappraised once statistics on local birth rates were released later in 2015.

Secondary schools were now forecast to be 37 forms of entry short of requirements. Whilst the expansion of free schools would assist, and there was likely to be an oversupply of forms of entry in September 2015 the situation would become less positive as 2022 approached. It should also be noticed that an oversupply could leave existing schools vulnerable, which needed to be avoided as all schools would be required given this likely situation in the future. The issue of students from outside the area attending selective schools in Slough also needed to be factored into the estimates.

The proposed SASH2 school's partial opening in 2017 was also included in the future projections. Given the fact that Slough was a highly built-up area, and that a site for this institution needed to be selected, any issues relating to this proposal would have an impact on school places. However there were other plans being made to lessen the pressure on school places, with Langley Grammar's expansion by one form of entry having been accepted by Cabinet and 3 other schools involved in discussions on similar proposals.

SBC had recently introduced planning for special educational needs (SEN), with Slough experiencing a level of SEN pupils that was slightly higher than the national average. Whilst expansion of SEN provision within existing mainstream schools would help meet demand, there was also the possibility that the expansion of Arbour Vale or the creation of a new, similar institution may be necessary. Should the last of these options be required, then some suitable sites had been identified.

The Panel raised the following matters in discussion:

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- The process of planning expansion evaluated a number of factors; the physical potential for expansion, any planning consequences and the status of the school (e.g. schools in special measures would not be expanded).
- In Primary education, the opening of Langley Academy had helped, as had the expansion of pre-existing schools. However, in Secondary education the opportunities for expansion (other than for 6th forms) had proved more limited. A major obstacle to creating forms of entry had been the lack of obvious sites in an area as built-up as Slough; in additions, expansions had to reflect the realities of catchment areas and therefore had focused on the centre of Slough.
- SBC was assisting schools in their funding of any building work. However, construction work had become more expensive which limited the authority's ability to do this. In addition, school expansion did not attract any additional funding for the new pupils for the first 6 months, leaving SBC and schools potentially vulnerable between September and April in any given academic year. A proportion of the Dedicated Schools Grant could be allocated to cover this, but there were also limitations regarding this. As a result, rapid expansion could have a financial impact.
- The Eden Girls' School was due to open in September 2015, and a site had been identified although the lease was not yet signed. However, free schools did not require planning permission for the first year of their existence, although should this then be rejected when the application was made later this could cause significant difficulty.
- The estimate of 90% of pupils in Slough schools being drawn from the area under SBC's control was based on the best information available. Whilst selective schools may attract a higher proportion of pupils from outside the Borough (e.g. Herschel had approximately 35% of its students from outside Slough) mainstream schools were much more likely to contain local pupils. This issue was also more applicable in Secondary education rather than Primary. However, another issue caused by selective schools was the potential for it to cause a gender imbalance in non-selective schools; at present, the ratio was roughly 60% boys to 40% girls and this could approach 70% boys if more Girls' Schools opened.
- SBC had formerly used the national formula to make predictions, but this only offered a 2 year forecast. The new system had increased the horizon for decision-making, but could not legislate for changes caused by extraneous factors (e.g. volatility in the housing market).
- Governing bodies had been involved in discussions on these plans; however, comprehensive consultation with all parents on every aspect would have been impossible.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

7. Special Educational Needs reforms

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SBC had made progress to ensure that the Children and Families Act 2014 was being implemented. This legislation emphasised the need for a more collaborative and integrated approach to children and young people with SEN (e.g. greater interaction between schools and social services). The central ambition was to overhaul the support offered to those with SEN to achieve better outcomes through planning, assessing and reviewing the provision available. The legislation also covered those between the ages of 0 and 25 years old, emphasising that education was only one aspect of service provision rather than one conducted in isolation.

Plans were now assessed with partners, with the ambitions of the families central to the process. A pilot had now been completed and the information gathered was being analysed to modify the service. SBC was also working in conjunction with the Department for Education and other local authorities in Berkshire.

(At this point of the meeting, Cllr Abe left).

SBC was responsible for 932 children and young people with statements, and had a deadline of April 2018 to review these statements. This would involve consultation with parents and professionals. SBC was also working on personal budgets; these were presently received by 12 families, and any future applications would require consideration although none had yet been received. The fact that other Berkshire authorities had been receiving applications allowed SBC to use this knowledge to make its own preparations.

The Multi Agency Transition Group had agreed Transition Protocols which came into operation in Year 9. These reflected the Local Offer, which was publically available via the SBC website and had been designed on the basis of a wide range of input. SBC was also investigating the potential for joint commissioning arrangements, both in terms of other professions dealing with children and other local authorities. However, whilst the expectation at national level was that the changes would lower costs, the likely rise in demand and the fact that the age range had now expanded to 0 – 25 would have a financial impact (at least in the short term). The priorities for the next 12 months were outlined on pages 35 – 36 of the report in the agenda papers.

The Panel raised the following matters in discussion:

- Whilst responsibility for those aged 16 – 25 was new, there had been no cases in this age range with which SBC had not had prior contact (given that they were SEN pupils up to their 16th birthdays). SBC was planning for different transitions for these young people, and was also receiving contact from young people who had previously been statemented and wished to be reappraised given the changes in legislation.
- The legislation allowed for the use of personal budgets through joint plans. However, they could not be used to buy school provision, and SENCO requests could not be imposed on schools. Therapies could be

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purchased using personal budgets, which was co-ordinated through a block booking.

- Provision for looked after children involved joint working with the relevant social worker; the restructured team also included those with social work experience, which bolstered the service.
- Work was being undertaken to identify young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). In future, transitional reviews at the Year 9 stage would be used to resolve this.
- SBC was not actively seeking out young people with Asperger's or other conditions which were not previously diagnosed. However, SBC would take referrals in these instances and would work with other services to help identify such cases.
- University entrants under the age of 25 would be covered by the plan. The Education, Health and Care Plan process would apply.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

8. Teacher recruitment

Slough required additional qualified teachers but was working in the context of a national shortage. In addition, both recruitment and retention were problems although the former was the more urgent at present. Cambridge Education (CE) was working collaboratively to address the situation and also sought help and support from members of the Panel.

The issues involving retention were most pronounced in relation to foreign teachers, who may wish to return to their native countries or encounter visa limitations. However, the main focus had been recruitment with a national campaign being held to draw in candidates from across the country. Schools were acting collectively on this matter, and were also drawing on the experience of other local services with similar recruitment issues (e.g. police, social care). SBC were developing a workforce strategy and headteachers were invited to link in with this initiative. The matter would increase in importance given the additional forms of entry outlined in minute item 6 (school places); Slough was the 3rd fastest growing local authority in England, and had experienced a 30% increase in pupil numbers since 2010.

Concerns were being raised about the potential impact on attainment for pupils; a high calibre of teacher needed to be attracted to raise standards. The current processes were also expensive, as employing agency staff to fill gaps could be both expensive and short term whilst advertising was costly and did not guarantee suitable applicants. Future cuts in funding (in real terms) also needed consideration. Officers also noted that shortages did not just apply to subjects traditionally affected (e.g. mathematics, sciences) but across all curriculum areas. Another factor with an impact was that of proximity to London Boroughs which offered additional pay under London weighting arrangements. Given the imperative nature of the issue, retention was now discussed at all meetings of local heads of Secondary schools.

The Panel raised the following matters in discussion:

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- There was some room for limited joint advertising for teachers to operate across the Slough area (rather than in relation to a specific vacancy at one school). The Schools Forum would discuss a report on this matter in September 2015; however, the domination of the Times Educational Supplement in the advertising market for teaching vacancies did limit the potential for significant cost cutting.
- Teachers had been shared between different schools in Slough on an informal basis. Consideration may be given in the future for formalising and codifying these arrangements.
- The 'Proud To Be Slough' campaign had been an example of improving the area's reputation, upon which CE could build. Whether this would take the form of an autonomous campaign (e.g. 'Proud To Be Education In Slough') would be one consideration in future efforts.
- CE had worked with Higher Education providers through the Teaching School Alliance to attract newly qualified teachers. However, Universities were losing some control of teacher training, which (whilst offering some benefits) did lead to a more fragmented system.
- Teachers in Slough tended to identify some key issues which negatively affected their views of the role. These frequently focused on workload, a lack of classroom support, pressures created by Ofsted and pay levels. The Panel requested that the Chair write a letter to the local MP reflecting these concerns. The fact that new teachers were often given less desirable responsibilities (e.g. classes containing students with lower attainment levels) was also raised as a concern.
- The progression of teaching assistants to teachers was already happening; however, methods could be used to increase the attractiveness of this to potential applicants. In addition, work had been undertaken with SBC to identify those who applied for social work positions and, whilst not being ideally suited to those roles, may be appropriate for employment in schools.
- Key worker housing was expensive. However, other alternatives (e.g. relaxation of the 5 year requirement for the letting policy for key workers, allocating a percentage of housing stock to those in education and social work) may prove feasible and effective alternatives.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Cabinet consider the implications of relaxing the lettings policy and allocating a certain percentage of housing stock to those employed in education and social work to increase recruitment to the local area.
- 2) That the proposed actions in section 5.9.2 in the report be undertaken, namely:
 - Members request that Cabinet consider this matter with recommendations for action
 - For the challenges and possible solutions to be brought to the attention of the Wellbeing Board which can consider the matter in the broader context of all statutory and non-statutory services and provision, including Police, Fire, Health, Social Care, and the private and voluntary sector

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- For the Local Authority to consider the re-introduction of Key Worker Housing or subsidised accommodation
 - For politicians (Elected Members; Lead Member for Education and Children; Lead Member of the Council; Member of Parliament) to bring to the attention of national government the magnitude of the problem facing Slough and its impact on standards and the success of children: for lobbying to achieve prompt action to alleviate the challenges
 - Promoting the attraction of Slough
 - Promoting the educational success and high standards of Slough pupils (Slough being 7th nationally for GCSE results, sustained year on year)
 - Promoting the good and outstanding schools across Slough
 - Promoting a strong and supportive Slough community of schools
- 3) That the Chair of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel write to Fiona McTaggart MP concerning the issues raised by teachers in relation to their work.

9. Children's Services- improvement update

The new Improvement Plan replaced the 4 previous separate plans, and set out SBC's priorities up to December 2015 (a period which included the transfer of services to the new Children's Services Organisation). The work was being undertaken on the basis of this transfer taking place on 1st October 2015. In addition, the Slough Improvement Steering Group met every fortnight and held SBC officers to account; this body would also involve the Chief Executive of the Children's Services Organisation once in place. A bid to the Department for Education had secured £165,000 of funding.

The report considered four matters, which were as follows:

- 1) Recruitment and retention
Decent, steady progress was being made on this although a higher number of agency staff were still being used than SBC wanted. Staffing was being analysed in depth to gain a full understanding of the situation and encourage the most appropriate members of agency staff to join SBC permanently. A survey had been completed which emphasised the fact that motivation contained many factors besides wage levels. A part time lead had been appointed to implement the strategy on recruitment and retention, with a national campaign being developed. May, July and September would see space taken out in the Guardian and the Metro as part of this, with an open day also scheduled for July 2015. Since April 2015, SBC had offered 20 permanent positions.
- 2) Quality Assurance
2 audit activities had been completed; the first was a focused 'deep dive', and the second had been funded by the Department for Education. Thresholds for investigations had been found to be sound, with case selection good, risk assessment working well but domestic

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abuse cases and the quality of plans identified as areas for improvement.

3) Quality of practice

New practice standards had been launched in May 2015 and aimed to clarify expectations from the service. A new practice lead for commissioning had also been appointed to drive forward improvements.

4) Leadership and partnership

Social workers had been placed with police to assist with integration and partnership working. The establishment of a Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) would also assist this, with the Care Commissioning Group contributing towards funding.

Overall, meetings had been reduced in number and been given stronger governance arrangements (e.g. chairs appointed, clear terms of reference put in place) to help increase the effectiveness of bodies working on improvements.

The Panel made the following points in discussion:

- Further work was still required to clarify thresholds; this would be needed to be undertaken with partners and within communities. The early help offer also needed some additional work; without these efforts, the number of referrals would continue to rise.

Resolved: that the update be noted.

10. Forward Work Programme

Resolved: that the following amendments be made to the Forward Work Programme:

- 1) That the Panel take the Slough Safeguarding Board Annual Report on 3rd December 2015.
- 2) That an item on the impact of the Private Finance Initiative be taken on 3rd December 2015.
- 3) That an item on closing the gap in attainment for disadvantaged children be taken on 3rd December 2015.
- 4) That the Five Year Plan outcome allocated to the Panel be taken on 28th January 2016.
- 5) That an item on school results be taken on 9th March.

11. Date of Next Meeting - 21st October 2015

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.43 pm)