

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Wednesday, 15th March, 2017.

Present:- Councillors Brooker (Chair), Chahal (Vice-Chair) (from 7.36pm), Anderson, Chohan (from 6.50pm), N Holledge, Pantelic, Qaseem and Sadiq (from 6.36pm)

Education Non-Voting Co-opted Members

Jo Rockall – Secondary School Teacher Representative

Maggie Stacey – Head Teacher Representative

Non-Voting Co-opted Members

Hamzah Ahmed – Slough Youth Parliament

PART 1

39. Declaration of Interest

Cllr Brooker declared his daughter's previous attendance at Burnham Park Academy, his position as Governor at Churchmead School. Cllr Holledge declared her position as a Governor at Cippenham Nursery. Hamzah Ahmed declared his membership of the Slough Youth Parliament until February 2017 and his position as Governor at Cippenham School.

40. Minutes of the Meeting held on 9th February 2017

With regards to minute 32, the minutes were amended as the Youth Offending Team had not been reduced in size.

Resolved: That, subject to the amendment noted regarding minute 32, the minutes of the meeting held on 9th February 2017 be approved as a correct record.

41. Action Progress Report

The Innovation Grant bid (minute 14, 26th October 2016) had been successful. This had led to Slough Children's Services Trust (SCST) being awarded £1.4 million by central Government.

Work experience for looked after children (minute 31, 9th February 2017) was targeted depending on the child's needs and skills. All such children who had expressed an interest had been allocated a placement.

(At this point, Cllr Sadiq entered the meeting).

42. Member Questions

The response to the member's questions was circulated and noted.

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43. Slough Youth Parliament

The first Youth Parliament had finished its term in February 2017, with the second Parliament in place. The Annual Report would be published in May 2017 and would reflect the excellent progress made over those 12 months.

Despite initial reservations from some parties about the likely success of the initiative, the Parliament had seen excellent engagement from all relevant groups. The Slough area had gone from being one of the least involved in the 'Make Your Mark' annual ballot of young people to the most improved area in the country. The Parliament had also hosted several Question Time events in partnership with Aik Saath, with panel members drawn from a diverse range of organisations (e.g. police, Heathrow airport, political parties). The last of these had seen The Curve filled by attendees and reflected the level of activity of the Parliament. Young people had also been involved with a community safety project, working on the perception of fear (particularly in public parks). They had also engaged with the issue of emotional and mental health work and tackling the taboos involved.

The recent Slough Youth Awards had been hosted by the Youth Parliament and promoted activism amongst young people. The Parliament had also secured the support of the local Labour Party for an extension of the right to vote to 16 and 17 year olds.

The work of the Parliament had relied on the young people's work, but was also supported by schools, local businesses and Slough Borough Council (SBC) officers and councillors. This alliance left the next Parliament in an ideal position to shape and influence future policy, and changes to Slough including the local community.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The 2017 elections had seen 2,000 more voters than the previous ballot. The new Parliament had a diverse membership and was building on the foundations it had inherited (e.g. the manifesto was finalised in March 2017). The Parliament did not exist in isolation; other bodies (e.g. Youth Inspectors) were a vital part of a sustainable and effective structure.
- All schools in Slough with one exception were represented in the 2017 Parliament; the exception had been caused by a timing issue. Most schools had seen lively campaigns for elections, although occasionally members had been elected unopposed. In these cases, SBC was committed to improving engagement.
- To be a member of the Parliament, the individual must be a resident of Slough. For Slough students in schools outside the area, arrangements had been made with Churchmead School and Burnham Park Academy. However, other schools did not have such agreements.

(At this point, Cllr Chohan entered the meeting).

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- Mental health issues were still hard to talk about; matters such as suicide rates in young men received less attention than was desirable. As a result, the matter was covered in the 2017 Manifesto. Members of the Parliament were engaged in Mental Health First Aid training, aimed at identifying issues at an early stage and acting as a first point of support.
- The inter-generational work undertaken by the First Parliament was also being continued. This was taking part in debates discussing how the Parliament could help with improving local communities.
- Schools have noted the improved confidence amongst participants in the Youth Parliament. The election process also generated a positive impression of the body and had seen significant engagement with the concept of civic duty. Knowledge of the workings of democracy had also been helped by event such as hustings being held during school assemblies.
- Whilst SBC was not involved in recruiting Parliamentarians for political parties, the initiative had seen young people encouraged to see themselves as agents in shaping local societies. Primary schools were now being considered for similar work, with SBC keen to build on national campaigns such as 'Eco Warriors'.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

44. Proposed Changes to the Funding Formula for Schools

The funding formula had allowed for local discretion in the model for allocating money to schools. However, the proposals for a National Funding Formula (NFF) removed this discretion. The majority of components of the final calculations were now being set nationally; however, whilst this was announced previously the details were limited. A consultation on the matter would conclude on 22nd March 2017.

The calculations left most schools in Slough with reduced settlements. Schools in neighbouring authorities tended to have a more mixed picture, but the fact that Slough appeared to have been treated as a London Borough left local schools in the same position as schools in those areas. The situation could have some minor changes as the figures presented to the Panel were based on 2016 – 17 statistics, but this was likely to be limited.

The main changes could be summarised as follows:

- The Primary / Secondary Ratio had been set at 1: 1:33 (meaning that Secondary schools received 33% more funding). This would move to 1: 1.29 before 2019 – 20, leaving secondary schools with less.
- The Lump Sum was not affected by pupil numbers, and currently stood at £100,000 for primary schools and £150,000 for secondary schools. The new arrangement would alter this to £110,000 for both.

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- The Growth Fund would now be calculated using historic data. In addition, the current flexibility for local authorities would end.

SBC and other parties would be responding to the Government consultation through 3 channels:

- SBC's response.
- The Schools Forum's collective response based on a discussion.
- Individual schools' responses.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- 2018 – 19 was, under the current proposals, a year for a transition towards the NFF. SBC would move towards the final settlement during this time to prepare for 2019 – 20, which would see central Government control put in place.
- The figures presented to the Panel were for the 1st year of the NFF. The rationale for these estimates had not been provided by the Department for Education. Whilst the funding floor had been included in this data, it was unclear if this commitment extended beyond the 1st year.
- Many Slough schools already had budget deficits. As a result, minimum funding had been in place for the last 5 years. However, with costs due to rise over the next 3 – 4 years (e.g. pensions, national insurance contributions, progress of staff through salary scales) innovative methods of reducing costs may be required. These could include increased class sizes, reducing the teaching staff or number of teaching assistants or the introduction of 4 day weeks for Key Stage 3 pupils. This would put immense pressure on maintaining quality of education and the outcomes for children. Examples of situations which were already being caused were the removal of A Level subjects from some schools' options.
- Given the concerns raised by the above point, the head teachers of local secondary schools had written directly to the Prime Minister. A copy of this letter was circulated to the Panel.
- Primary schools were struggling to recruit teachers. This had led to agency staff and the resulting long term pressures on finance, concerns over provision for SEND students and ratios of pupils to staff. As with secondary schools, innovative approaches to savings may be required.

Resolved: That the Panel receive a verbal update on the matter in autumn 2017.

45. Slough Local Safeguarding Children's Board

The report presented to the Panel consisted of 3 elements:

- The Business Plan

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- The foundations being put in place for improved performance
- Areas for further action to bolster safeguarding

The last report received by the Panel had followed the Ofsted report, which outlined several key criticisms of the Safeguarding Board (SLSCB). The new Chair (Nick Georgiou) had taken post in September 2016, and was charged with operating the Business Plan. This had 6 themes, based on the shortcomings highlighted by Ofsted, and the Chair was happy to report that it contained several positive quotes taken from the November 2016 Ofsted monitoring visit. All themes had seen progress, which was presented to the Panel in Appendix A.

In order to ensure future improvements, SLSCB's meeting on 16th March 2017 would focus on the Business Plan. Other efforts made to build solid foundations for the future included appointing the new Chair; given his role as Chair of the Adult Safeguarding Board, he a) had a knowledge of the local area and b) could ensure co-ordination between the bodies. The reporting line between SBC and the SLSCB Chair would also be re-established, with the Interim Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services and the responsible Commissioner all involved in co-ordinating the transfer of responsibility from SCST. The Chair was a member of the Joint Improvement Board. Finally, the refresh of SLSCB sub-groups had also aligned their work with the Board's priorities, and each sub-group had terms of reference, a work programme and a Chair from the membership of SLSCB.

(At this point, Cllr Chahal joined the meeting).

The Chair of SLSCB was also a member of the Safer Slough Partnership. All these developments had assisted with the coherence of safeguarding in Slough and partnership working. However, the SLSCB and its adult counterpart were not planning to merge in the foreseeable future; the focus would remain on improving the current bodies.

Future concerns remained over some issues. Funding was drawn from SCST, SBC, Thames Valley Police and the Probation Service; however, the figures involved were limited. Relevant staff would also require more specific learning and development on the policy area; at present, SLSCB was reliant on good will from its partners, but this may not be sustainable. Furthermore, SLSCB's profile needed to be raised. Lay membership still required recruitment, whilst the Board would need to be ready for Ofsted inspection at any time over the next 18 months.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The sub-groups had a very high level of engagement from members, and the membership was also appropriate. There are concerns about the progress with the Education subgroup, and following discussion with the DCS input to the group will be increased.
- The Chair's performance management will be undertaken by SBC as responsibility is transferred back to SBC. The minutes of the 1st such

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meeting had been kept; however, conversations with the Secretary of State and SBC Commissioner on the matter were not recorded.

Resolved: That the Panel receive an update on this once the transfer of responsibility for SLSCB to SBC had been completed.

46. Update on the Return of Education Services to Slough Borough Council

The process of resuming responsibility had accelerated, which had made the autumn of 2016 an onerous period. With the 3 lots completed on 1st September, 1st November and 1st December 2016 respectively, SBC had now finished the process. Lot 2 was particularly challenging given the short notice on resuming responsibility for Children's Centres, and also involved the largest number of staff (109). SBC was currently creating a Senior Management Team as a priority, with the post of Head of Commissioning, Partnership and Performance funded by the Department for Education. Schools were now handled under the 'Plan on a Page' presented as Appendix A. There were a very small number of Human Resources issues (e.g. equalisation of annual leave in some limited cases) but these were being resolved.

The Schools Forum had been very supportive, and good working relations with head teachers had been developed. SBC was now looking to appoint to key areas (e.g. Education Consultants) and would also be asking Council to support a Direction from Government to return SEND provision to SBC. Overall, the process of transferring responsibility back to SBC had been successful and had allowed for progress to be made rather than simply maintaining existing performance levels.

The Panel made the following points in discussion:

- The resumption of direct responsibility had allowed for more action on areas such as school improvement and clarified SBC's role. Academisation and the arrangement with Cambridge Education had made the relationships involved feel more distant.
- The schools of concern policy had now been published; this had helped provide clarity on SBC's role in school improvement.
- SBC and SCST had also acted in unison on the early health initiative.
- The new Director of Children's Services had been selected on the basis of their ability to take forward the changes already underway. The new Director would be in position for a month whilst the Interim Director remained in post to provide a full handover.
- Early Years provision and Children's Centres were the areas with the highest numbers of vacancies. There would also be some restructuring of services as the situation settled.
- The Panel requested that the number of staff at Cambridge Education at the time of the transfer, and the number who transferred over to SBC be circulated to them.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

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47. Schools Admissions

The report was taken by the Panel.

The Panel requested information on how many pupils attended the school closest to their home. However, members were reminded that faith schools may be an exception to this being possible or desirable; the information held may also make detailed information on this hard to obtain.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

48. Forward Work Programme

Resolved: That, in addition to the points made in previous minutes, an item on Outcome 4 in the Five Year Plan be added to the agenda for 18th July 2017.

49. Attendance Record

Resolved: That the attendance record be noted.

50. Date of Next Meeting - 19th April 2017

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.10 pm)