

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 7th December, 2017.

Present:- Councillors Brooker (Chair), Chahal (from 6.55pm), Chohan, N Holledge, Matloob (from 7.20pm), Qaseem and Sharif

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillor Sadiq

Education Non-Voting Co-opted Members

Mercedes Hernandez Estrada (Secondary School Representative)

Non-Voting Co-opted Members

Hamzah Ahmed (Slough Youth Parliament)

Apologies for Absence:- Cllr Kelly

PART 1

23. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Brooker declared his positions as Governor at Churchmead and Ryvers Schools. He also declared his membership of Slough Borough Council's (SBC) Foster Panel.

Hamzah Ahmed declared his membership of the Local Safeguarding Panel and his position as Governor at Cippenham Primary School.

24. Minutes of the Meeting held on 25th October 2017

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 25th October 2017 be approved as a correct record.

25. Action Progress Report

The Little Book of Sunshine would be sent to members after the meeting. In addition, the emails regarding services for children and childhood obesity would be forwarded to the new members who had recently joined the Panel, as well as co-opted members.

Resolved: That the Action Progress Report be noted.

26. Member Questions

With regards to the number of school governor vacancies, SBC neither held this data nor was under any obligation to do so. However, it would be gathering more information on the matter when a relevant officer was appointed in 2018. This officer would be pursuing the matter with individual schools, with whom responsibility for the matter lay.

Resolved: That the responses be noted.

27. Elective Home Education

The report presented the picture in Slough and the national context, and also outlined the contractual and financial arrangements involved. In particular, the absence of a thorough regulatory regime for the issue had made risk management a central concern.

In Slough, there were 121 known examples of home schooled children. These were spread almost equally between primary and secondary schools and included pupils from all years in compulsory education. 6 of these children were subject to Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans, whilst another 6 had active involvement from either social care or early help. The situation in Slough was very much in alignment with the national picture; as with many local authorities, SBC would value more powers to ensure that children were receiving quality education, and a mandatory registration regime to support this.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The vast majority of parents home schooling their children allowed SBC to undertake visits. In these cases, the first visit would be within 6 weeks of notification of the intention to home school, with subsequent visits being annual. Should the child have special educational needs or a disability, then a SEND specialist would be present at the visit. Home visits did also look at the physical environment and any safeguarding issues. SBC had the right to refer any matters arising to Social Care.
- The few cases where parents did not allow visits (in Slough, 2 or 3 such instances) generally arose from an unwillingness to engage with authorities.
- These visits provided detailed reports. These covered the reasons for home schooling being selected by the parents and the support SBC could offer in this.
- Exact estimation of the number of home schooled children was complicated by the fact that only children being withdrawn from schools needed to notify SBC. Should a child never be registered at a school, SBC had no means of verifying that this child was now being home schooled.
- SBC did not hold any information on the results of children receiving home schooling. Furthermore, such children were not obliged to take public examinations; so long as they were receiving an education, legal obligations were being met by the parents. However, it was stressed that in 70% of cases visited, provision was satisfactory and some home schooled children did receive good qualifications.
- The Private Bill proposed by Lord Soley did have cross party support in Parliament. However, it was expected to encounter difficulty in receiving the necessary time in debate to become law; as a result, Government was expected to issue guidance rather than pass legislation on the matter.

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel - 07.12.17

- In approximately half the cases known by SBC, parents stated that they provided home schooling as it was preferable to the alternative. Other reasons given in remaining instances included medical grounds, the children being too young for education in large groups, problems with travel to school, their preferred school not offering a place or being part of the traveller community. Traditionally, the main reason had been well educated parents feeling that they could offer their children a better education than the state provided, but this was changing in recent years.

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

- Pupil premiums did not follow the child from the school to the parents should the child have been in receipt of this whilst in mainstream education.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

28. Joint Parenting Panel Quarterly Update

This was the first report for an item which would become a regular feature of future agendas; a quarterly update was specified in the Joint Parenting Panel's (JPP) terms of reference. The overall context of the JPP was the Corporate Parenting Strategy (comprising of 6 priorities, with an action plan for each), the Joint Care Leavers' Strategy (which outlined what care leavers could expect in care and afterwards) and the Pledge (19 promises for children in SBC's care). The terms of reference were being refreshed, and would be confirmed on 13th December 2017.

The JPP was a private meeting held by SBC. It was designed to ensure that Councillors and Non-Executive Directors of the Slough Children's Services Trust (SCST) could demonstrate their commitment to delivering better outcomes for children in care. Central to this was ensuring that the voice of the child was at the heart of deliberations.

Meetings were themed. The meeting in June 2017 focused on children in care developing positive relationships; the increased stability in social worker allocation to children was a vital element of this. In addition, the Reach Out! Helpline allowed children to speak to a trusted person at any time, including evenings and weekends. July's meeting was centred on education, employment and training and securing the best access to opportunities. September's meeting looked at keeping children in care safe and the role of early help and intervention in that. Lastly, the workshop in October 2017 had compiled a balanced scorecard for the service, including qualitative and quantitative measures. Ofsted's views on the JPP had been positive; whilst it had highlighted some disaffection with the previous format of the meetings, this had been altered to put children's concerns at the heart of proceedings.

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel - 07.12.17

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The transition from school to adulthood was a key concern. A Transition Protocol had been signed by the Director of Adults and Communities to ensure corporate backing from senior management dealing with both children and adults and the involvement of all relevant services. Preparation for independence after education was co-ordinated and focused on employment as the route towards free choice. Accommodation and the use of apprenticeships had been supporting these efforts. Ofsted had also noted the positive impact of SBC and SCST pooling their resources in this drive.
- Personal Assistants had also now been appointed to support children in all elements of their lives. In particular, the extra emphasis on personal contact (e.g. checking they were OK during the Christmas period, asking about outcomes on GCSE results day) had helped with ensuring that children felt part of a community.
- The first JPP meetings had been deemed to be somewhat formal and alienating. As a result, JPP had agreed to attend their forums so that children could feel comfortable in a more familiar surrounding. The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) were acting as independent chairs to further counteract any feelings of distance from JPP and allow greater opportunity for children to challenge service providers.
- SCST also had a Participation Officer whose role centred on building relationships between the organisation and children. All children in care also had Independent Reviewing Officers; this was a separate system which was designed to ensure that the wishes and views of children were included in service provision.
- SCST used the national Bright Spots programme to conduct a survey on care leavers' views. The results of this were shared with JPP.
- There was a statutory duty to keep contact with care leavers up to the age of 21. The Care Leavers Forum was part of this duty; SCST had learned much from this body and used this information to make significant changes. Take up from care leavers in the Forum had also increased drastically since SCST assumed responsibility for the service, despite some individuals remaining unwilling to engage. Staff were constantly reminded that the level of care expected would mirror the level of care staff would provide if the children involved were part of the officer's own family.
- SCST had investigated the potential of mentoring schemes. However, the rapid changes in the lives of young people as they moved into University education or employment made this difficult. This was recognised as a major area for future SCST efforts; in addition, ensuring that reporting on progress used responsible rather than judgemental language was vital in building effective relationships.
- Whilst life skills had received significant emphasis, members asked if emotional skills were as prominent in service planning. Foster carers and other key individuals were advocating for children in care and ensuring that they were well looked after. In addition, the Virtual Head was proving to be a tenacious and determined worker on behalf of children in care, and was committed to ensuring that they got the life

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel - 07.12.17

chances and support they required. Relationships with key people such as teachers was vital in providing the rounded care package required.

- SCST was emphasising continuity of relationships as another key aspect of emotional wellbeing. Offering children in care a greater sense of permanence was key to boosting the feeling of being valued.
- The proportion of children in care who did not enter education, employment or training (NEETs) after school was not available for the meeting. However, it was a KPI on the balanced scorecard. Employability Passports and work experience was also key parts of the package aimed at mitigating the risk of children in care entering the NEET category. Opportunities to use the links with SBC (e.g. apprentice schemes) could also be explored.

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

- JPP was committed to offering a genuine forum for engagement, commitment and challenge.

Resolved: That future updates from JPP include a summary of recent meetings.

29. Forward Work Programme

Resolved:

1. That the items on school place planning and school standards be moved to 14th March 2018.
2. That the item on SEND reforms implementation be taken on 18th April 2018.
3. That Cllrs Brooker and Sharif be approached to arrange a date to discuss teacher recruitment and retention.

30. Attendance Record

Resolved: That the attendance record be noted.

31. Date of Next Meeting - 8th February 2018

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.24 pm)