

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Wednesday, 18th April, 2018.

Present:- Councillors Brooker (Chair), Kelly (Vice-Chair), Chahal (from 6.58pm), Arvind Dhaliwal, Matloob, Qaseem and Sharif

Education Non-Voting Co-opted Members

Mercedes Hernandez Estrada – Secondary School Representative

Apologies for Absence:- Cllr N Holledge

PART 1

54. Declarations of Interest

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

55. Minutes of the Meeting held on 14th March 2018

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th March 2018 be approved as a correct record.

56. Action Progress Report

Resolved: That the Action Progress Report be noted.

57. Member Questions

The response to the written questions was circulated. Members were reminded that whilst academies may have post holders called Trustees or Directors, these were essentially the same as traditional Governor roles. In addition, Academy Trusts usually had a small number of Members who sat above these positions and focused on the wider strategic operation of Trusts. The matter was currently scheduled to be covered as an agenda item in 2018 – 19.

Resolved: That the response be noted.

58. School To School Support In Slough

The Slough Teaching School Alliance (STSA) had 3 member institutions, which were employed as hubs to create a sustainable support network. These schools had to meet nationally agreed criteria to be members, and then took on different strategic priorities to ensure the best possible coverage in the area. Given the size of Slough, this was a high number of accredited teaching schools and provided a solid base for improvement.

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The School Improvement Fund had also raised the profile of Slough schools; it was an innovative scheme, and SBC were unaware of any other authorities running such an initiative. The encouragement of joint bids to maximise available funding had also bolstered dialogue between institutions, whilst a head teacher had been seconded for 2 days a week to assist co-ordination between SBC and the STSA.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- As well as the general positive feedback, SBC had been commended by the Regional Schools Commissioner for the School Improvement Fund. Recently, £49,500 had been dedicated to this to top up the existing funding. However, after this had been allocated then there would be no further money for the initiative under current plans.
- Bids were assessed on a range of established criteria and funding allocated accordingly. Visits to schools to talk to staff and students were also part of the process once projects were underway.
- Given the nature of the funding available under the School Improvement Fund, bids tended to be joint applications from a number of institutions. When funds had been awarded, updates on each project would be collected and circulated every half term, with a full report presented to SBC and the Regional Schools Commissioner once a term.
- Both the geography of the schools involved and the nature of the projects being funded (e.g. special educational needs, higher ability students, nursery children and GCSE candidates were amongst those who were the subject of funded initiatives) ensured that children across Slough were receiving the benefits of the School Improvement Fund. It was hoped that these successes would encourage a high number of bids for the new funding available.
- The School Improvement Board had held 2 meetings so far. The Board had been created to provide a strategic overview and conduct an Annual Risk Assessment. It was building on SBC's established relationships with academies across Slough, and was receiving an encouraging level of support from local head teachers.
- Funding was recognised as an issue; the centrally retained element had been abolished, meaning that consultants now had to be financed through the General Fund. As a result, this could be affected by changes in SBC's corporate priorities, and the model may need to be adapted accordingly. Present systems would be in place for 2018 – 19, but guarantees beyond this date could not be given.
- The National Funding Formula was starting to take effect, and was having an impact on all schools (including academies). Initial estimates indicate that the impact on Slough may be greater than that experienced by other authorities; this could place pressure on the level of support staff in schools. However, class sizes would not be affected (although this could have an impact on teacher workloads).
- Slough had 12 Multi Academy Trusts (MATs); however, these tended to be small in size (2 – 4 schools) whilst Department for Education

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advice was that MATs needed to incorporate 12 – 16 schools to be financially viable in the future. As a result, there may be some alterations to the local picture in coming years.

- Sponsored academies were those which took over local schools deemed to be under performing. These had generally had a good impact, and also worked well with SBC (despite there being no legal compunction to do so).

(At this point, Cllr Chahal entered the meeting)

- Whilst there had been national examples of under performing schools struggling to find sponsors, this had not happened in Slough. In addition, there were no such examples in Berkshire as a whole.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

59. School Places Planning Update

Local authorities were under statutory obligation to ensure that there were enough school places for the local population. The report presented outlined Slough's predicted position for the next 5 years; however, given the changeable nature of local demographics in Slough, the plan required flexibility.

Birth rates had increased significantly from 2000 onwards (over 50% by 2010). However, sufficient forms of entry had been created to provide education for all, and (based on the latest birth rate data – 2015 – 16) this would continue to be the case. The dynamic movement of the local population also meant that (on average) 1 additional class of students had to be accommodated by local primary schools every year. This was built in to the system; however, the last year had seen an atypical reduction in primary students during the academic year. Bulge classes were also in place if required; as a result, SBC was in a good position to react quickly to any changes in demand.

A series of new Free Schools and expansion projects, plus the existing forms of entry, should allow SBC to cover demand for secondary school places until 2021 – 22. There was also a significant programme of expansion underway for Early Years, whilst Cabinet had approved projects to increase Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) places in March 2017. The exact specifications of the project in Arbour Vale were still being defined.

In total, £60 million may be required to fund these projects over the next 5 years. Given the financial situation, a significant amount of borrowing may well be required for this. However, overall SBC was in a good position to provide education for all local children.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

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- The Grove Academy had opened in September 2017. At present, it was using the former Thames Valley University site, but would move to its permanent Chalvey base in 2020. The geography of the proposals (e.g. flood plain) would make planning permission complex; no date could yet be specified as to when this assent would be given.
- Applications for local school places were monitored monthly to assess trends. Whilst both primary and secondary demand had recently reduced, it was impossible to state whether this was a permanent change in the pattern yet. Equally, the impact of developments in Slough may prove hard to predict; for example, whilst Crossrail may bring in new residents, would these tend to be young, single professionals with no children? Given this, the devised projects were designed to deal with any level of population change created by SBC's new house building.
- Langley Grammar school had recently redefined its catchment area; this had led to an increase in the number of local children attending. However, grammar school admissions were complex due to the admissions criteria and the number of children from outside Slough who attended.
- Upton Court Grammar School had also received more Slough pupils in 2017 – 18 than previous years; however, whether this indicated an overall increase in the number of Slough children at grammar schools (or just a shift in the schools which were attended by a static number) would require further analysis.
- Grammar school entry was determined by 1 test, which was universally applicable to all 4 Slough grammar schools.
- Splitting siblings was recognised as a major issue in the admissions process; Slough's current surplus was helping avoid this in as many cases as possible. The Admissions Team would assist parents on a case by case basis.
- The borrowing mentioned in the introduction above would place pressure on the Capital Programme, and require eventual repayment over time.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

60. Special Educational Needs and Disability Update

Responsibility for SEND had moved from Slough Children's Services Trust to SBC in October 2017. A major element of the responsibilities were prescribed by The Children and Families Act 2014; in particular, the age range for which SBC had responsibility had now extended to 0 – 25 years old. An emphasis on aspirations had also been made in this legislation.

There were 2 levels of support; Tier 1 and the more intensive Tier 2 (where students required Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) as part of their provision). Whilst the proportion of children and young people in Slough with Tier 1 support was significantly below national averages, the proportion requiring Tier 2 was significantly above national averages.

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Overall, the system now had a more holistic focus (rather than being specifically academic). As a result, SBC's SEND service worked with Social Services, health care providers and parents to build a rounded support package. Given this change in focus, previous Statements of Special Educational Need required conversion to EHCPs. At the time of this meeting, of the 650 statements inherited, 98 had yet to be converted; these would be prioritised, whilst ensuring that the quality of them would not be compromised by the desire to resolve the outstanding cases. The SEND service had also been working on governance for a year to ensure that all individual provision needs were met.

Staffing was now close to complete, with only one position currently vacant. The service was anticipating an imminent Ofsted inspection; unlike their school equivalents, these did not offer gradings but rather would require authorities deemed to have areas of weakness to provide written statements of action. Since September 2016, nearly half of the 30 local authorities inspected had fallen into this category; no action arose in the cases where Ofsted did not deem there to be areas of weakness. Should a statement of action be required after the inspection, the local authority would have a year to complete the actions outlined in its implementation plan.

Parent Carer Forums were vital in raising awareness and involving parents and carers in decision making. Slough's forum ('Special Voices') was undertaking vital work on the matter. The appointment of the SENCO School Effectiveness Officer had also been vital, with co-ordination between schools (e.g. 2 new forums set up since January 2018) and work on upskilling imperative in supporting SEND work across Slough. Work on banding would conclude at the end of 2018, whilst a steering group was assisting on developing the local offer.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The disparity between Tier 1 and Tier 2 statistics has been discussed with the SENCO Network. Whilst no firm conclusions have yet been drawn, it may indicate issues with early identification of children with special education needs. As a result, this would be an area where SBC and school joint working would be prioritised.
- The working groups were assisting with joint working. SBC was receiving positive feedback on the matter, and the high level of attendance from local schools was very positive.
- The Implementation Grant was being used to support the conversion of statements into EHCPs. This was not ringfenced, but had been agreed for the duration of 2018 – 19.
- Briefings with schools had been held regarding the Ofsted inspection. An operational group had been meeting frequently (once a fortnight at first, now monthly) and the Clinical Commissioning Group was also supportive. Schools were aware of the criteria used by Ofsted and were using self evaluation forms to prepare; Task & Finish Groups were also being commissioned on the matter.

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- Some families were resistant to having their children assigned as SEND. Work with schools was being undertaken to offer support on this and ensure that the most positive messages were conveyed. It was hoped that this may also assist with the early identification issues mentioned earlier in these minutes.
- Children with EHCPs had nominated support, so would not be affected by any changes in the level of support staff employed by schools. However, current banding arrangements were complex and may not be fully aligned with the priorities emerging from the 2014 legislation; this was being reviewed.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

61. Attendance Record 2017 - 18

Resolved: That the attendance record be noted.

62. Date of Next Meeting - 17th July 2018

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.58 pm)