

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 7th February, 2019.

Present:- Councillors Sharif (Chair), Kelly (Vice-Chair), Brooker, Matloob, D Parmar, A Sandhu and Strutton

Education Non-Voting Co-opted Members

Paul Kassapian - Secondary School Representative

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors N Holledge and Minhas; Alaa Fawaz (Slough Youth Parliament)

PART 1

34. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Brooker declared his positions as Governor of Churchmead and Ryvers Schools, his membership of Slough Borough Council's Foster Panel and his position as Vice-Chair of the Joint Parenting Panel (JPP).

Councillors D Parmar and Strutton declared their membership of the JPP.

Councillor Kelly declared his employment with Lynch Hill School Primary Academy.

35. Minutes of the Meeting held on 6th December 2018

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6th December 2018 be approved as a correct record.

36. Action Progress Report

Councillor Strutton sought further details about unauthorised absences, for example, an analysis of the reasons for the absences. It was agreed that the Attendance Service would provide a report on this to Panel at a future meeting.

Resolved: That the Action Progress Report be noted.

37. Member Questions

No questions were raised at the meeting.

38. Children's Centres Task & Finish Group - Final Report and Recommendations

The Chair and other members of the task and finish group reported that they had been impressed by the services offered at the centres they had visited and the quality of the staff involved. In particular, Members had observed the

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value of range of integrated support for families well beyond the development of the children involved. The recommendations of the group focused on:

- The maintenance standards for the buildings from which the services operated.
- The alignment with Heathrow Airport, particularly in relation to the Vicarage Way site and in terms of employment opportunities.
- The value of extending the current offer beyond the current age threshold of 8.
- The development of relationships with partners and the options for other services, such as local libraries delivering satellite services.
- The scope for generating new income through the hire of accommodation to offer complementary services.

Members of the Panel raised a number of points in discussion, as follows:

- Councillors should demonstrate support for the centres and their staff by continuing their visits periodically.
- It would be important to maintain the centre buildings to a good standard.
- Businesses, including those connected with Heathrow, should be actively encouraged to support the work of the centres, in part in compensation for the impact of the airport's operation on the learning of young children.
- The centres could assist in addressing the tendency of parents with children in maintained nursery schools opting out of the extended childcare offer which was having an impact on the total resources available locally since funding was based on the number of children involved.

The Panel agreed to receive a report monitoring the work of the centres every two years.

In response to the suggestion that there should be a further report considering data available on childcare take-up, the Chair proposed that this be discussed in relation to the future programme (see 8 below).

Resolved –

That the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group be approved and adopted, as follows:

- 1) Maintain the standard of buildings with regular checking of facilities.
- 2) Ensure the relationship with Heathrow is developed to support Children's Centres in the surrounding area.
- 3) Investigate the cost of extending the offer to children and families across higher phases in Slough.
- 4) Build on the excellent relationships with delivery partners to extend and consolidate the offer.
- 5) Explore further the opportunities for other agencies to operate out of children's centres (e.g. libraries) to deliver satellite services.
- 6) Establish more formal opportunities for children's centres to generate additional income by letting out parts of the building in a manner which

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does not impact on service delivery or compromise safeguarding arrangements.

39. 30 Hours Extended Entitlement - Final Report and Recommendations

The Council was seeking to increase participation rates in the three entitlement schemes for childcare: Funded 2-Year-Olds, Universal 3 & 4-Year-Olds, and Extended Entitlement. There were different eligibility rules for the schemes, meaning it was more challenging to present an integrated offer. Efforts to promote the schemes included the Brighter Futures campaign, the engagement of parent champions and the use of social media, both Twitter and Facebook. It was trying to address certain myths about the schemes such as the belief that parents had to choose 15 hours of childcare or 30 hours, rather being able to adopt more flexible patterns; also, parents could choose to split hours across different settings if this was more feasible or suited them better. There was differential take-up across the school terms given the impact of children transferring to reception classes, and this impacted adversely on the January "census" figures which were used for funding decisions. Although Slough was doing reasonably well in achieving participation by comparison with our statistical neighbours and national comparisons, there was still scope to improve levels of take-up. The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment demonstrated that the sector locally could cope with increased numbers of participants; childminders were being encouraged to offer options for care outside traditional working hours.

A number of points were raised in discussion, as follows:

- a) Efforts should be made to reach parents at an earlier stage in the year in order to moderate the fall-off in participation rates in the Autumn term; it was pointed out that some of this reduction was due to children started school and this element would not be affected.
- b) The provision for children with special educational needs: most settings were very inclusive and the Council had a limited fund to be able to make small changes to facilitate these places.
- c) While the proportion of Slough providers offering the 30 hours childcare option under the scheme was at 60%, it was recognised that a number of schools had decided this was not financially viable as the staffing ratios for the care of two-year-olds was radically different from that for a nursery class. There was sometimes reluctance in relation to the other demands on schools, for example, meeting the needs of vulnerable children. Schools were encouraged to become involved where a case could be made that the arrangement would be cost-neutral at worst.
- d) Through the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment and school place planning processes, the Council sought to promote a balanced and varied provision; a mix of different settings was seen as a better way of meeting parents' and children's needs. Arrangements were in place to

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ensure that there was no double funding of placements in different types of settings.

Resolved –That the report be noted, in particular that:

- Comparing national figures with percentages in Slough (5.13) clearly identifies the need to develop more extended entitlement provision in Slough schools.
- National reports indicate that childminders offer the extended entitlement with greater flexibility than other providers. Support work is currently focussed on encouraging more childminders to provide the 30 hours extended entitlement.
- The ongoing support for childminders includes further development of a new SEND network focussing on skills development and developing an offer of inclusive practice and provision.
- A review of the barriers to 30 hour place take up will begin in February at a workshop session with managers of PVI's.

40. Early Years Workforce Report

The Council was engaged in a workforce development strategy across the sector, the first for the Borough, promoting the opportunities and value of working in childcare and early years services. Information was provided on the range of roles available and efforts made to dispel myths around low pay, low status, low skills and male workers being unsuited to or unwelcome in the sector. Saturday and evening information sessions were held on a termly basis with 25 to 30 attending on average; about a third of these attendees followed up their initial interest. Taster opportunities working as a volunteer were available as were apprenticeship routes into the sector.

A number of points were raised in discussion, as follows:

- a) While one of the aims was to increase work options for local residents, it was recognised that those without qualifications needed more flexible routes such as through volunteering and apprenticeships. Efforts were made to increase awareness of qualifications and the sector through social media and parent champions. A campaign called "Ever Thought of a Career in Childcare" had been established and it was already attracting considerable interest.
- b) Some people might not have the time and resources to undertake formal qualifications, particularly in view of the rates of pay for some roles, and it would therefore be useful to maximise opportunities to learn on the job in the same way as teaching assistants did.

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- c) While there were links with the local FE college, the Chamber of Commerce and Job Centre Plus to promote the sector and sessions booked at University employment days, staff did not routinely visit secondary schools nor include these job roles in work experience opportunities. Further consideration would be given to whether links with schools would be worthwhile.

Councillor Kelly reported that a number of parents of children at the primary school where he worked, would ask about early years work and the School could signpost them to this initiative. Relevant publicity material would be provided to Councillor Kelly.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

41. Forward Work Programme

In response to questions related to the School Places report, it was confirmed that there was little to add in relation to the closure of Burnham Park School than had been included in the information sent to members of the Panel; this had indicated that alternative places would be available for pupils in other local schools. In summary, there were surplus places in the primary sector while the secondary sector was tighter. Detailed information had been made available in the place planning strategy available on the Council's website.

In relation to the take-up of childcare places, it was agreed that this be considered for the 2019-20 scrutiny work programme, following consultation with the Chair of the Panel for that Municipal Year. In the interim, relevant information would be emailed to members of the Panel once the data in the January census had been analysed.

Resolved – That the programme for the next two meetings be re-arranged as follows:

13 March 2019:

- Attainment for Slough children (including vulnerable groups)
- Teacher recruitment and retention
- School Places – present situation and future demand

17 April 2019:

- Implementation of SEND Reforms
- Joint Parenting Panel – quarterly update
- Impact of Slough Children's Services Trust

42. Attendance Record

Noted.

43. Date of Next Meeting - 13th March 2019

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.51 pm)

Chair