

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Tuesday, 17th July, 2018.

Present:- Councillors Brooker, N Holledge, Kelly, Matloob, D Parmar, A Sandhu, Sharif and Strutton

Education Non-Voting Co-opted Members

Mercedes Hernandez Estrada – Secondary School Representative

Non-Voting Co-opted Members

Alaa Fawaz – Slough Youth Parliament

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Minhas

PART 1

1. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Kelly declared his employment by Lynch Hill Primary Academy School. 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 and his position as Vice Chair of the Joint Parenting Panel (JPP).

2. Election of Chair for 2018 - 19

Cllr Brooker nominated Cllr Sharif as Chair for the Panel. This was seconded by Cllr A Sandhu.

Resolved: That Cllr Sharif be elected to the position of Chair of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel unanimously for the Municipal Year 2018 – 19.

(At this point, Cllr Sharif took the Chair).

3. Election of Vice Chair for 2018 - 19

Cllr Strutton nominated Cllr Kelly as Vice Chair for the Panel. This was seconded by Cllr Brooker.

Resolved: That Cllr Kelly be elected to the position of Vice Chair of the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel unanimously for the Municipal Year 2018 – 19.

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4. Minutes of the Meeting held on 18th April 2018

It was agreed that the minutes for item 60 should be amended to remove references to Tier 1 and Tier 2, as these were not used in the area of special educational needs and disability.

Resolved: That, subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 18th April 2018 be approved as a correct record.

5. Action Progress Report

Resolved: That the Action Progress Report be noted.

6. Member Questions

No member questions were submitted prior to the meeting.

7. Joint Parenting Panel Quarterly Update

The update focused on the 19th April 2018 meeting, which had covered priority 1 of the Corporate Parenting Strategy (Our looked after children and young people will be supported by strong and effective corporate parenting). In relation to priority 1, the key points were:

- The corporate parenting strategy was thoroughly revised in 2016 and will be refreshed in 2018;
- The JPP was refocussed to ensure that the voice of the child is paramount;
- A JPP score card was introduced in October 2017 to facilitate scrutiny of Slough's corporate parenting role;
- Annual Member training on corporate parenting was introduced;
- A Trust commissioning and sufficiency strategy helped target priorities for children in care; and
- SBC introduced exemption from council tax for care leavers up to the age of 25 years.

SBC's housing strategy included a focus on housing pathways for care leavers; 7 internships for care leavers were created within the Council and its partners as a result of the Council's employment education and training strategy; the Council's Young People's Service worked collaboratively with the Trust to provide targeted "Life Skills" support to care leavers transitioning into independence; and Slough schools complemented the work of the Trust's Virtual School, helping to support children looked after.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- Given that a significant proportion of JPP members were new, the first meeting of 2018 – 19 would recap key issues relating to corporate parenting. Training for all Councillors (not just JPP members) would be

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provided in September 2018 and new JPP members would continue to receive support in their duties throughout the meetings held this year.

- Members were reminded that corporate parenting was the responsibility of all Councillors, not just those on the JPP or the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel. Equally, SBC officers needed to understand their responsibility on the matter.

(At this point, Cllr Matloob entered the meeting)

- Children in the care of SBC who had been placed outside of the Borough were treated the same as those who remained within Slough. Some councils which were now home to care leavers from Slough placed these individuals on their housing registers. However, it was recognised that a proposal to exempt such care leavers from Council Tax could be of benefit to those concerned and their cost could be calculated.
- The proportion of looked after children who were placed inside Slough or a 20 mile radius had risen from 69% to 72%. However, whilst a higher proportion was welcomed, it was almost impossible to maintain a figure of 100% for a variety of reasons (e.g. need to relocate away from gangs, specialist education).
- The independence of the voice of the child was respected through several mechanisms. The Reach Out! Scrutiny Forum was facilitated independently, whilst an independent advocacy charity was involved in holding discussions with children away from officers. Monitoring visits had commented on this aspect of improvement, whilst children themselves had raised it as a welcome development during the September 2017 training event mentioned earlier in these minutes.
- Areas such as life skills, support with entering the housing market and confidence were emphasised as SBC aimed to increase the independence of its children in care. The progress made on this was measured through the 'strengths and difficulties' questionnaire.

Resolved:

1. That a reference be made to Cabinet requesting that care leavers outside of Slough also be exempted from Council Tax in areas where reciprocal arrangements were in place. (NOTE: this is already SBC policy, so no reference to Cabinet will be required).
2. That information regarding the number of apprenticeships offered by SBC, the number of those which lead to permanent roles and the number of apprentices who found permanent roles elsewhere be circulated to the Panel.

8. Children's Social Care - Verbal Update

The recent Monitoring Visit had focused on looked after children and had been, overall, the most positive visit since the Trust had assumed responsibility for services. It had noted the major improvement in key areas since 2016, the implementation of the recommendations made at the previous inspection and the quality assurance in place under new arrangements.

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Audits had provided significantly better results and the cases assessed demonstrated an accurate picture of the child's progress was being recorded. The process for looked after children was also more secure and timely. However, in a small number of cases, changes in the situation of the child had not been reflected in records. The care planning process was also substantially improved, although could be slow in some instances. Staff morale had risen with the stability of social workers also having increased. Overall, children felt safe and secure in their placements.

In terms of areas to improve, managerial oversight still required further work. In addition, whilst data quality had improved it was still not at the desired standard.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The stability of placements had improved, although this had not historically been a weakness. Both the short term and long term measures used to adjudicate on provision here put Slough above the national average, although not in the top quartile.
- In cases where a handover was required, the policy was to allocate the case before the first worker left. A handover meeting would then be organised, including discussion of a plan for the individual concerned; however, it was recognised that this is not always the case. Children were also encouraged to be honest about their relationship with the social worker; forums for this included discussions with Independent Reviewing Officers, the Reach Out! Scrutiny Forum and email.
- Within the Children's Services Trust, the Senior Management Team were permanent with the exception of the Chief Executive and the Head of Improvement. Equally, the proportion of agency workers had fallen to approximately 20% in Child Protection teams; the figure was higher in the Front Door team but still lower than previously. The students recruited through the 'Step Up' programme had also now graduated to permanent positions in many cases.
- However, it was impossible to reduce agency worker levels to zero. Despite the fact that sick pay, annual leave and other benefits may be less for agency workers, the pay levels and flexibility offered by such an arrangement was preferable for them.
- The Trust's emphasis on 'deep impact' work (intended to make change permanent and children more resilient) was more labour intensive than previous approaches. Given this, workloads had been reduced; having previously been an average of 22 cases per social worker, this figure had now reduced to 13.
- Should a child ask about changing their social worker, an advocate would be appointed and the matter investigated. The Trust would then moderate the case; some withdrew the request, some pursued it and in these cases a worker may or may not be reassigned. In those cases where a change was required, the average turnaround was a matter of weeks.
- Intervention in cases was based on thresholds, rather than the number of referrals made to the Trust. The levels of children who had left the

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care of the Trust being readmitted was tracked, and statistics indicated that the 'deep impact' approach was increasing the level of permanent change in children's lives.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

9. Forward Work Programme

The Panel wished to record its thanks for the contribution of Mercedes Hernandez Estrada.

Resolved:

1. That the proposed work programme be approved, with the following additions:
 - 24th October 2018: Youth Offending Teams
Youth Service and Vulnerable Children
 - 6th December 2018: Section 11 Audits
Joint Parenting Panel
 - 17th April 2019: Joint Parenting Panel
2. That a Task & Finish Group on Children's Centres be commissioned.
3. That information regarding the number of unauthorised absences from schools, the fines issued and the percentage of fines unpaid be circulated to the Panel.
4. That information regarding home education be circulated to the Panel.

10. Date of Next Meeting - 24th October 2018

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.56 pm)