

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 16 MAY 2017

Councillors Present: Mike Johnston, James Podger, Richard Somner, Emma Webster and Laszlo Zverko

Also Present: Catalin Bogos (Performance Research Consultation Manager), Tessa Ford (School Improvement Advisor), Ian Pearson (Head of Education Service), Elaine Ricks-Neal (Principal Adviser for School Improvement), Katie Blakemore (St John the Evangelist Infant and Nursery School), Stephen Chard (Principal Policy Officer), Trudi Collins (Pupil Premium Lead, Little Heath School), Kate Flowerdew (Deputy Headteacher, Spurcroft Primary School), Charlene Hurd (Democratic Services Officer), David Ramsden (Headteacher, Little Heath School) and Gaynor Zimmerman (Headteacher, St John the Evangelist Infant and Nursery School)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter, Councillor Lee Dillon, Councillor Marigold Jaques, Councillor Gordon Lundie, Councillor Alan Macro, Councillor Tim Metcalfe, Councillor Ian Morrin and Councillor Garth Simpson

PART I

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2016 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

5. Actions from previous Minutes

The Commission considered the update report. Stephen Chard advised that the first meeting of the Joint Health Scrutiny Group to conduct scrutiny of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West NHS Sustainability and Transformation Plan was held on 13 March 2017. Councillor Richard Somner was the Chairman.

Resolved that the update report be noted.

6. West Berkshire Council Forward Plan 7 June 2017 to 30 September 2017

The Commission considered the West Berkshire Council Forward Plan for the period covering 7 June 2017 to 30 September 2017.

Resolved that the Forward Plan be noted.

7. Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Work Programme

Stephen Chard introduced the report to Members and advised that a proposed new scrutiny model was approved at full Council on 9 May 2017. Going forward, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC) would continue to meet on a quarterly basis, in the main to consider financial and performance monitoring, but there was also scope for other in-meeting scrutiny.

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Building on this, the new model sought to establish the OSMC Members and Substitutes as 'scrutineers' whose remit was to visit/ engage in existing work streams in order that they could directly contribute towards the development of that particular task/policy. The methodology for this approach was in the process of being refined.

It was agreed that a copy of the Corporate Programme would be included in the OSMC agenda so that Members could consider which areas of work they wanted to be involved in.

Councillor Emma Webster stated that the intention was to avoid duplication and to facilitate direct contribution from Scrutiny Members. Stephen Chard advised that there would still be scope for task groups to be established but these were resource dependent and task groups would be considered on a case by case basis.

Resolved that the work programme be noted.

8. Items Called-in following the Executive on 4th May 2017

No items were called-in following the last Executive meeting.

9. Consideration of Urgent Items

There were no urgent items to consider.

10. Councillor Call for Action

There were no Councillor Calls for Action.

11. Petitions

There were no petitions to be received at the meeting.

12. West Berkshire Pupil Performance 2016

Ian Pearson thanked Members for providing the opportunity to discuss the topic and stated that it had been an area of focus since Pupil Premium Grants were introduced in 2011.

The grant aimed to assist disadvantaged children - defined via their parent's annual income. It acknowledged that investment was required in schools to support this group of disadvantaged children. Various strategies had been introduced, at a national level, to address educational attainment but minimal improvements had been made. Notwithstanding the fact that there had been some great success stories locally.

Members were advised that the cohort of Pupil Premium (PP) children in West Berkshire was relatively small and therefore, the percentages referred to in progress reports could be misleading as often they were reflective of only a small number of children.

There had been various national strategies introduced to address the matter but, in many cases, the situation was unchanged – notwithstanding the fact that there were some exceptional cases of success in places.

Ian Pearson highlighted that the measure did not include those children out the periphery of the PP criteria but who could be considered 'in need' of the additional support. National strategies were being considered to address the potential issue within this identified group of children.

Elaine Ricks-Neal advised that there had been a positive seismic shift in provision for disadvantaged children in West Berkshire schools. The PP focused on disadvantaged

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children in primary and secondary schools and provided proportionate funding to enable extended work to support these complex areas.

In West Berkshire there were 200 pupils in Year 11 who met the PP criteria. When these figures were investigated in more detail it highlighted that each child had complex and extended needs. Schools had to develop localised strategies to deliver the support appropriate for each child and the wide range of needs they might have. Elaine Ricks–Neal stated that it was useful to hear what activities and strategies the schools had in place to support this group of children.

Tessa Ford advised the Commission that she supported the schools and constructively challenged them to consider ways and means to address the issue and assess PP systems.

Katie Blakemore, St John the Evangelist Infant and Nursery School, advised that she had 12 students who met the PP criteria which was a significant percentage within a very small intake of children therefore, it was important that data was considered with a degree of caution. She stated that a lack of parental engagement appeared to contribute towards the performance of children associated with PP. She aimed to meet with parents each academic term with their respective teacher present at the meeting also. The aim of the meeting was to set the child a learning target or specific form of support tailored to the need of that child and to recognise their successes.

Councillor Emma Webster asked how supportive the parents were with this approach.

Katie Blakemore advised that some parents could be difficult to reach / engage with. However, perseverance was key to overcoming those obstacles and in many cases it enabled them to move forward with the family meetings. Kate Blackmore stressed that each meeting was specific to the needs of that child and the wider family – Teaching Assistants were involved in the process in order that the school raised awareness around each child's needs and awareness of the wider PP cohort.

In response to questions asked by the Commission, Kate Blackmore stated that primary schools often linked with local secondary schools to share information around each child and their learning needs which supported the transition.

David Ramsden, Little Heath School, advised that transitions had improved over the course of the past six to seven years due to the links between primary and secondary schools. It also enabled the secondary school to know about the forthcoming year 7 cohort. However, out of area transitions were still problematic and this could be an area for improvement with help from the Council.

Councillor Webster stated that sharing information to support transitions was vital and that the frustrations might be mutual across borders. She supported the need for assistance with this going forward.

Councillor Richard Somner asked for more information relating to known effects of parents not engaging with schools and their child's education. Katie Blakemore advised that quite often the child was aware of their parent's lack of engagement with the school which could have negative effects on the child. However, the school ensured that this did not impede their access to resources.

Kate Flowerdew, Spurcroft Primary School, advised that there were often assumptions around the needs of a child where their parents failed to engage with the school. Often this problem linked to issues around uniform, attendance and could lead to anti-social behaviour.

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Katie Blakemore stated that many of those children had a wide range of issues and the school needed to look at these in detail in order to enable / support children with the best suited environment for learning.

Kate Flowerdew advised Members that the role of the school was fundamental and, in some cases, was the driving force behind the child's development.

David Ramsden explained how the level of intervention required from schools drained resources but that they were often the most appropriate place for the work to take place with the child/ parents. He stated that engagement with parents was fundamentally linked to improvements in their child's attainment level.

Councillor James Podger stated that it was useful to hear about the approach taken by schools and that they were keen to use every opportunity to engage with parents to encourage improvement.

Trudi Collins, Little Heath School, advised that some parents viewed free school meals negatively and therefore, overlooked their right to receive the service. She was aware that some families who met the PP criteria had not applied for the 'grants' associated with free school meals. Tessa Ford explained that there was a degree of frustration around the process; parents had to apply for the grant associated with free school meals although their child might be entitled to PP. Schools had issued key messages to parents around this issue in the hope that more applications for the grants would be submitted, but this was still an issue for children in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

David Ramsden explained that he had previously written to the Department for Education to explain how there was a need for a PP contingency fund because they were trying to support a vulnerable group of children who might need very bespoke arrangements to improve attainment levels. Councillor Webster expressed her support and stated that the Commission should follow up the letter and write again if necessary. Councillor Webster requested a copy of the letter in order to do so.

Members heard how West Berkshire statistics were compared with London schools where, comparatively, the number of white British students differed to percentage rates in West Berkshire. Tessa Ford explained that statistics suggested that White British students had lesser educational aspirations compared to other ethnic groups which reflected in the attainment levels of students.

David Ramsden stated that there was a known issue around benchmarking and use of national comparisons. He emphasised that growth could vary and that a schools role was to encourage improvement but this could not be considered under one blanket measure or standardised across the piece.

Trudi Collins explained that, no matter what changed at a national level, there would always be a need to support the cohort of 'disadvantaged' children and the focus should remain on their needs to encourage educational attainment.

David Ramsden stated that it would be useful if the Council supported the sharing of information/ best practice through the arrangement of networking meetings (for example). This would encourage everyone to attend and offer a platform to share toolkits.

Kate Flowerdew advised that there were 65 pupils in receipt of PP at Spurcroft Primary School. The school accessed specific advice through the Council and sharing of best practice would be useful for them.

Councillor Webster asked whether sharing best practice across borders had been considered. Tessa Ford advised that there used to be a cross border networking forum which was well attended. Since then, schools had introduced PP leads and a network

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specific to that role had evolved – however, sharing best practice from their forum was a good idea and something Tessa Ford would look into further.

Councillor Somner asked whether Governors were involved in the PP process at any stage. Katie Blakemore advised that they had a PP Governor who sat in the PP progress meetings and was aware of the activities underway/ planned. The Governor offered constructive challenge and fed back into the wider Governing body.

Trudi Collins explained that they had a new PP Governing lead and that they provided a holistic overview of PP arrangements within the school – looking at areas for improvement and where to build on existing good work. The interaction with the new lead had been positive so far.

Kate Flowerdew advised that the PP Governor and Finance Governor in place took an active role in knowing the PP arrangement at Spurcroft Primary School. The school also facilitated Governor open days for them to see, first hand, the activities underway to support PP children.

Katie Blakemore explained that there could be various arrangements in place to support a child but if they were not ‘ready to learn’ then progress could be very slow – noting that external distractions would influence the rate of progress. Kate Flowerdew supported those comments and mentioned that sometimes students’ required emotional support and that schools recognised this as an obstacle for learning as well.

David Ramsden stated that a lot of work went into supporting this ‘disadvantaged’ group of children and in many cases there would always be limited progress. However, it was important to note that progress was relative and potentially limited for a percentage of the PP cohort due to limited numeracy and literacy skills. Little Heath School had developed a ‘start right’ toolkit to help close the gap in literacy and, in turn, help the students access the wider curriculum.

Ian Pearson summarised the key areas of focus moving forward. There was a strong awareness of PP pupils, their individual needs and goals. Good attendance and a high level of parental engagement were key factors in the performance of these pupils. Schools worked in partnership to help deliver the best outcomes possible and best practice was shared on an ongoing basis.

Councillor Webster thanked the group for their contribution and it was obvious that a lot of support was in place for PP students.

Resolved that:

- The report be noted.
- A letter should be sent on behalf of the Commission to support the request for a PP Contingency Fund.

13. Key Accountable Performance 2016/17: Q3

Catalin Bogos introduced the Quarter Three Key Accountable Performance (2016/2017) report to the Commission. Members stated that the (newly introduced) scorecard offered a useful performance summary at the front of the detailed report.

Educational attainment was reported as Amber in light of the ambitious target set by the Council. However, this target was fully supported through the Council Strategy. Catalin Bogos stated that the performance measure encompassed results from all groups/abilities therefore, presenting some challenges when the Council aimed to improve attainment as a whole.

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Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 results were made available in December 2016 which fed into the quarter three performance report. Catalin Bogos advised that the Council continued to focus on achieving education attainment rates within the top 25% quartile nationally. The RAG status was reflective of the ongoing work required to meet the target by the end of the Strategy.

Affordable housing results were not available at the time when the quarter three report was produced. Catalin Bogos stated that, since then, 44 affordable housing units had been delivered. Although measured on a quarterly basis, the current RAG status was reflective of the accumulative number of units delivered 2016/2017.

There were a number of projects underway which were captured within the 'Key infrastructure improvements' measure. Catalin Bogos stated that the flood prevention and drainage improvement schemes had exceeded the target set for the end of the year. However, measures had been put in place to address delays in work required to achieve 94% of West Berkshire households having access to superfast broadband.

Overall, performance in 'Good at Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults' was reported as green. Various improvements had been implemented across the piece and the latest inspections from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) had rated four out of the five Adult Social Care services as 'Good' or better in the area of safe. However, timeliness of responding to adult safeguarding concerns was below target at the end of quarter three due partially to data recording practices although these would be addressed going forward.

In response to questions asked, Catalin Bogos advised that the report did not include a targeted measure for the number of affordable housing units required during 2016/2017. Although progress was not monitored in the same way, it had been agreed to include the topic in the Key Accountable Performance report by presenting the number of completions as a contextual measure in order to raise/ maintain awareness of the priority. Councillor Emma Webster suggested that Scrutiny involvement might be to consider whether policy hindered planning/ developmental progress in West Berkshire.

Councillor Webster thanked Catalin Bogos for the report.

Resolved that the report be noted.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.13pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature