

DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 15 JULY 2025

Councillors Present: Martha Vickers (Chairman), David Marsh (Vice-Chairman), Dennis Benneyworth, Nick Carter, Martin Colston, Owen Jeffery, Paul Kander and Stephanie Steevenson

Also Present: Steven Bow (Consultant in Public Health), AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director - Children's Services), Councillor Heather Codling and Vicky Phoenix (Principal Policy Officer - Scrutiny)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Joanne Stewart

PART I

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

2 Children's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Task Group Report

Councillor Martha Vickers presented the Children's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Task and Finish Group report (Agenda Item 3). Councillor Vickers noted the wide-reaching organisations that took part in the review and thanked them for their contributions. It was advised that this special meeting was taking place to expediate referring any recommendations to Executive and the BOB ICB.

During the Committee's discussion the following points were raised:

- Evidence shared from witnesses during task group meetings highlighted the importance of supporting children in early years.
- It was noted that many schools in West Berkshire did not have a Senior Mental Health Lead (SMHL) and that this was no longer funded by central government. Pupils in those schools were disadvantaged in their mental health support. It would be beneficial to have a SMHL in all schools.
- It was noted that the Mental Health Support Team (MHST) did not cover the whole of West Berkshire and that was particularly so in the east of the district. Members of the task group wanted to ensure that all schools had this service.
- It was emphasised that funding for youth services had been cut significantly over the past 12 - 15 years. The task group found that Berkshire Youth were doing a great job, particularly at the Waterside Centre. However, facilities were lacking in other parts of West Berkshire. A recommendation was made by the task group to review the facilities available for young people across West Berkshire. It was believed that there may be an opportunity to receive further funding from central government.
- It was noted that there was work underway developing 0 – 19-year-old family hubs across West Berkshire. The task group report would be shared with Members of

HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 15 JULY 2025 - MINUTES

the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee who would be reviewing the development of the family hubs.

Action: Vicky Phoenix to refer the report to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee.

- AnnMarie Dodds, Executive Director for Children's Services, advised the Committee that the MHST service was funded by the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB). Until this year they commissioned West Berkshire Council to deliver MHST's in schools. They were no longer commissioning West Berkshire Council and now had commissioned Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (BHFT) to deliver the service. This would start in August 2025. This was a single commission across Berkshire West. It was not confirmed what this would look like yet. This would move from a community-based model, that was one of the most effective MHST's in the country, to a medical model and so children would likely not be receiving support in school but would need to go to a health setting to receive the support. There would be significant changes. West Berkshire Council did a collective bid with the other Berkshire West authorities but were unsuccessful. There had been legal challenge around the procurement of the service by the ICB.
- AnnMarie Dodds advised that the schools that did not receive support from the MHST's were supported by the Emotional Health Academy. The BOB ICB part-funded this service. Recently the BOB ICB had written to West Berkshire Council to advise they would be withdrawing their funding of £150,000 towards the EHA. AnnMarie Dodds had challenged the BOB ICB on this and they were awaiting an update.
- The impact had been a loss of ownership by West Berkshire Council of the MHST and potentially EHA due to the decisions of the BOB ICB.
- Members of the Committee expressed significant concern in response to this news. It was agreed that a covering letter to the BOB ICB be attached to the recommendations referred to them and should include further questions around the changes to MHST delivery and funding of the EHA.
- It was confirmed that MHST and EHA worked with academies as well as maintained schools.
- Councillor Heath Codling, Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board and Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services, expressed concern around the reorganisation of the BOB ICB and their significant funding and staff cuts. It was suggested that an appeal was needed to the two MPs for West Berkshire. It was also advised that the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB JHOSC) would be convening to meet with the BOB ICB shortly. Councillor Vickers attended this with Councillor Steevenson. Councillor Vickers would consider if this could be raised as part of that forum's work programme.

Action: Cllr Vickers will raise this as a possible item on the work programme of the BOB JHOSC.

- It was confirmed that town and parish councils were highlighted in the task group report recommendations as key stakeholders in communities. Examples were shared around how town and parish councils could provide services and provisions for children and young people in their local areas. This included a table tennis table, play bags and youth outreach workers all funded and provided by town and parish councils. Particularly for more remote areas initiatives by town and parish councils were very helpful. There was funding such as Members bids

HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 15 JULY 2025 - MINUTES

that could be accessed, and some town and parish councils had funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy and their precept. This was potentially a further way to assist local areas to create opportunities to provide something for children and young people in an area. This would differ from parish to parish. It was advised that Members could raise this directly with Town and Parish Councils.

- It was advised that communications around the task groups report and recommendations would be helpful and would be considered.
- It was noted that the current family hubs were not easily accessible to people in rural areas and that community outreach was essential.
- It was noted that reduced funding and the impact of covid were significant factors impacting the concern around children's mental health and emotional wellbeing. Without financial investment significant improvements would be difficult.
- It was highlighted that the outcomes and recommendations of the task and finish group report were wide-reaching. All officers and partners attending the task group meetings as witnesses were very positive about the scrutiny review taking place. It was agreed it was essential that the recommendations be progressed. The concerns raised around the BOB ICB did not negate the recommendations in the report. Members of the task group advised they were very impressed by all the contributors and organisations (highlighting the voluntary sector) involved in the scrutiny review and the work that they did in the local area to support children and young people.
- AnnMarie Dodds highlighted that there was a crisis underpinning the SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) system. It was advised that emotional wellbeing and mental health were one of the highest reasons for referral of children into social care. Both child and parental mental health and emotional wellbeing were significant in any aspect of children's services whether that be education, SEND or children's social care. It was essential to address this through the multiple ways captured in the task group report's recommendations. This included health, engagement, parenting support, support for children and young people, diversionary activities and social cohesion coalescing around emotional wellbeing. Scrutiny of emotional wellbeing was necessary but the nature and scale of this was a challenge. It was advised that the findings and recommendations in the scrutiny report, and the questions being asked in the committee, were the right ones.
- It was asked what the impact on parents would be of the changes to the MHST provision and reduced funding for the EHA. It was advised that the family hub development work was key to answering this. The government definition of family hubs was from 0 – 19 and up to 25 for children who have additional needs. In West Berkshire family hubs had been largely for 0 – 4-year-olds. AnnMarie Dodds noted that the governments direction around the families first agenda, with new legislation coming in April 2026, brought the focus onto early intervention and prevention. It was known that children did best in their families. This was also the case for schools - outcomes were best for children when educated in mainstream schools in local communities. There were challenges in West Berkshire due to the reducing numbers and low birth rate. Additionally, some schools had financial challenges which put them under further pressure.
- It was highlighted that maintained nursery schools did essential outreach work in early years and worked in deprived, rural areas. It was confirmed they would be involved in the development of family hubs and that the co-production of that was ongoing.
- Members discussed the options available to the Committee regarding the recommendations. It was agreed that the recommendations be approved to be

HEALTH AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 15 JULY 2025 - MINUTES

referred to Executive and the BOB ICB. Following the concerns raised today, it was agreed that a strong covering letter to Executive and the ICB be attached expressing concern about the changes to the MHST and EHA funding.

Action: Chairman and Vicky Phoenix to draft a covering letter to the referral of the recommendations to the BOB ICB and Executive.

- It was confirmed that the progress of recommendations would be monitored by the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee.
- It was also confirmed that a letter be written by the Chairman to the MP's and to the Health Minister. It was also suggested that Members engage with Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire who may also be affected.

Action: Chairman and Vicky Phoenix to draft a letter West Berkshire MPs.

Action: Chairman and Vicky Phoenix to write a letter to the Minister of Health.

- It was noted that timescales would help support the progress of the recommendations. Of note, the work on mobile phones in schools was identified as needing a timeline. It was advised that timescales will be considered as part of the responses to the recommendations. There would also be timescales shared for a response from Executive and the BOB ICB.

RESOLVED to refer the Children's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Task and Finish Group's recommendations to Executive and the BOB ICB for consideration.

(The meeting commenced at 1.00 pm and closed at 1.44 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature