

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 25 JANUARY 2017

PRESENT: Councillors Edward Wilson, David Evans, Lynne Jones, Marion Mills (Vice-Chairman), Nicola Pryer and Eileen Quick (Chairman)

Also in attendance: Mr Louden

Officers: Daniel Crampton, Alison Alexander, Hilary Hall, Rob Stubbs, Alan Abrahamson and David Cook.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received by Cllr McWilliams, Mr Cook and Cllr Airey (Lead Member).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

The Part I minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2017 were approved as a true and correct record.

COMMUNITY LEARNING AND SKILLS SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

Philip Wright, Head of Learning and Community Services, (Slough Borough Council) and Safia Mohamud, Community Learning and Skills Manager, attended the meeting to provide an update on the performance of the Community Learning and Skills Service in 2015-2016 and the outcomes of the Ofsted inspection of the Service undertaken in June 2016.

The Panel were informed that the service had worked closely with RBWM's Head of Commissioning , Adult, Children and Health, to aligned the service with the Adult, Children and Health Services directorate vision and priority outcomes. Appendix 1 gave details of how the service contributed to the directorate outcomes, with the majority of the performance targets having been met.

As the responsible authority Slough BC were subject to an Ofsted inspection in June 2016 with adult learning programmes being graded as "requires improvement", section 2.12 of the report details the strengths and weakness identified in the Ofsted report. Section 2.13 of the report showed how the service was putting into place a series of actions that would support managers in raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

The Panel were informed that a detailed post-Ofsted action plan had been implemented Progress is monitored by the shared service management committee.

Cllr Jones mentioned that East Berkshire College had recently been rated as 'requires Improvement' and asked if they were on board with the improvements mentioned in the report. The Panel were informed that one of their strategies was that only good providers of education would be used. They had written to East Berkshire College about their Ofsted rating and asked for quality assurances.

(Cllr E Wilson joined the meeting)

The Chairman asked if they worked with the Berkshire College of Agriculture and was informed that when there was a tender process no tender was submitted by them.

Cllr D Evans asked for clarification on the ratings for adult education and was informed that there was the entry level, level 1 and the final level 2 which was equivalent to GCSE. Cllr Evans also raised concern that the report seemed to suggest that there were teachers employed who did not have sufficient skills to teach English. The Panel were informed that all the teachers were sufficiently qualified. There were the right tutors with the correct qualifications for specific courses.

The Chairman asked for clarification that all tutors had the correct level of language skills and was informed that all tutors are tested and if there are areas requiring improvement they are encouraged to up skill if they wish to continue with their contract.

(Alison Alexander joined the meeting)

Cllr Evans asked about how the courses helped residents gain employment and was informed that all students had an initial assessment and after the completion of each level they are encouraged to move onto the next level. There was more than just improving language skills there was also life skills that helped them get employment and settle into the community.

Cllr E Wilson asked if the contract was monitored and was informed that there was a joint management committee that had been strengthened by using independent advisors. The Chairmanship of the committee rotates between the two authorities and Lead Members received performance report. The Annual report was also presented to this scrutiny panel. Cllr Wilson recommended that a joint meeting with Slough Borough Council be held to look at scrutiny arrangements

Cllr Jones mentioned that some courses required improvement due to attendance and punctuality. The Panel were informed that when they did management walk through to assess the quality they did focus on attendance and would contact learners who were not attending. Punctuality was not a problem.

Resolved Unanimously: that the report be noted.

BUDGET 2017/18

The Panel received a presentation from the Head of Finance on the 2017/18 Budget which Cabinet were due to approve and would be going to Council.

The Panel were informed that the proposed budget contained an increase in revenue investment of about £2.5 million to help protect the most vulnerable people in the Borough. Examples of increased investment included £1 million added for adult social care, £400k for expanding the practical support for homeless residents, £330k for rising home to school transport for special needs pupils requirements and £120k over three years for increasing early years pupil premium spend.

There was also proposed investment in the Planning Department, for tree maintenance and investment for our voluntary organisations providing community needs.

The proposed council tax increase was 0.95 percent which was lower than the retail price index There was also a proposal to increase the adult social care precept by three percent.

The Panel were informed that the proposals meant that a band D property would pay £961.46 for their council tax.

With regards to Fees and Charges the Panel were informed that the majority of charges would see no increase in real terms. There had been a few increases that brought the borough in line with neighbouring authorities where we had been significantly under charging in the past.

With regards to Capital investment the Panel were informed that over the last few years the Council had decided to make a number of strategic capital expenditure, such as school expansion and new library. Historically loans would have been taken to fund these projects however it had been decided that instead of loans the Council would use its reserves to fund capital projects saving about £150k in interest rates. The Panel were informed that, as demonstrated in the Financial Update reports, this policy was no longer sustainable and thus it had been decided borrow money for capital projects.

It was proposed that over the next year about £75 million would be spent on capital projects that included a further £12.1 million for the ongoing schools expansion plan, £14.5 million for stage one of the new leisure centre, £9.4 million for stage one expansion of Broadway Car Park, £9.2 million enhancing York House, Windsor, £8.3 million for other property and parking improvement, £4.5 million for the consolidation of the St Clouds Way development site and £1.6 million for LED street lighting.

The Panel were also informed that with regards to Business Rates it was proposed that there would be a local newspaper business rate relief of £1,500 per title, all locally controlled rate reliefs maintained, rural rate relief extended and redefined and relief for reinvigorating vacant retail units to be extended to all commercial and industrial premises.

The Panel were shown specific areas of the Budget relating to Children's Services including:

- Fostering fees and charges – core allowance, aligned with national recommendations for DfE.
- Savings which had been discussed by cabinet in September 2016 and Full Council in December 2016.
- Growth in home to school transport and Children Services social workers.
- Capital expenditure with the Schools Expansion Programme and repairs to youth centres.
- A £5 million increase to the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Cllr Pryer mentioned that with regards to pupil premium there would be an increase of £300 per child and asked how the effectiveness of this would be monitored. The Panel were informed that it was proposed that specific measures would be taken to get specific outcomes depending on the child's requirements in early years settings. The providers had to bid for the money identifying need. There was also funding for targeted training and training for schools to assess good behaviour. There would be measures for young people and how their language was holding them back that and thus there would be a focus on this in the multi year programme. There was also a schools offer of support.

Mr Loudon questioned the apprentice levy and was informed that it applied to all organisations that had a budget of over £3 million and thus smaller schools should not be affected. Some multi agency trusts would attract the levy and the Borough would be charged for schools eligible to pay the levy. Schools had raised concern about the levy but the only other option would be for the Schools Forum to agree alternative payment methods.

Cllr Jones asked why on page 36 of the report there was an increase in support services to schools and was informed that this was an additional allocation of the DSG to early years provision.

Cllr Jones also asked mentioned that over the last few years there had been a pressure on the home to school transport budget and asked if the additional funding would be sufficient. The Panel were informed that home to school transport would continue to be a pressure but more funding had been allocated after a lot of analysis had been undertaken. There may be a small

cohort of SEN pupils who may not qualify under the new arrangements but if they had existing funding then it had been agreed that this would continue to be paid for the duration of their education.

Cllr Jones asked if borrowing to fund the schools expansion programme was the only option and was informed that there was basic need and S106 funding however the Council had made a strategic decision to borrow for a variety of major capital projects that would be funded by assets and future payments from the regeneration programme.

The Chairman asked if there was concern that some schools would be hit hard by the DSG and if the Schools Forum could help. The Panel were informed that the National Funding Formula resulted in an increase across the borough of over £200k, however some school would see a reduction whilst other would see an increase in funding. The Schools Forum were due to meet to consider the implications.

Cllr E Wilson recommended that there be a standing item on the School Improvement Forum regarding pupil premium.

Cllr E Wilson also questioned why there had been a proposed allocation of £720k for a new sports hall for Lowbrook School and was informed that this was because they had agreed to increase to a 2 form entry as part of school expansion and a negotiated sum of £1.6 million was agreed to do this. It became apparent that it would be more effective to build a 2 story sports block and thus additional capital funding was being proposed. The school had approached the EFA to cover the costs of the whole project but they needed financial underpinning until this decision was made in March 2017.

Cllr E Wilson raised concern that there could easily be concern raised from our residents that there was a lot of Council funding going to academy schools. The Panel were informed that with regards to lowbrook the additional funding was because they had agreed to school expansion to provide additional school places that the authority were obliged to provide.

Cllr Evans asked about the foster care allowances that looked as if funding was being reduced. The Panel were informed that there had been analysis done on fostering rates and care allowances. If the foster care were still getting two payments they would still receive £640, it was felt that not many careers would be effected.

Resolved unanimously that: The Children's Services O&S Panel considered the Cabinet / Council report and endorsed the recommendations. Cllr Jones abstained from voting on the item but reported that she supported the budget lines related to Children's Services considered by the Panel.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

The Panel considered the latest Financial update report that was projecting a £473,000 underspend on the General Fund which was a further increase of £38,000 since the last reported figure at Cabinet in December 2016. As such the council had a combined General Fund Reserves of £6.33m, well in excess of the £5.27m recommended minimum level.

The Adults, Children and Health directorate project an overspend of £192,000 with significant impacts, both favourable and adverse, coming from demand led services where demand was difficult to predict and small numbers could have significant budgetary impact.

The significant changes from the previous month's report for the directorate were:

- £157k increase in the cost of home to school transport.
- £107k increase in the placement costs of children in care.
- £70k increase in the placement cost of children with disabilities.
- £75k increase in the staffing cost of the MASH

- £153k decrease in the placement costs for adults with a learning disability.
- £96k decrease in the placement costs for adults with mental health problems.
- £100k decrease in the cost of providing homecare and direct payments to adults.
- £50k reduction the cost of meeting deprivation of liberty safeguards

Corporate and Community Services projected an underspend of £64,000, with improved positions in visitor management and in development and regeneration, offset by a small fall in planning application income. Operations and Customer Services continued with an excellent position of £596,000 underspent.

Cllr Jones asked how much borrowing was there at present and was informed there was currently no borrowing.

Cllr E Wilson asked if it was possible to allocate reserves to school projects and was informed that a Cabinet decision would be required to do this but it was important to maintain a sensible level of reserves to cover future risks.

Cllr E Wilson also asked if the reports focus on specific cost management would be maintained when the AFC contract was signed. The Panel were informed that there would be contract management against spend. Any variations to the agreed contract would come back to the Council for approval.

Resolved unanimously: that the Children's Services O&S Panel endorsed the report.

OUTCOME OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION SAFEGUARDING PEER REVIEW - DECEMBER 2016

The Panel considered the report and received a presentation on the Outcome of Local Government Association safeguarding peer review.

The Panel were informed that the Local Government Association safeguarding peer review of children's services took place between 5 and 9 December 2016. Feedback from the review overall was positive. The outcomes reflected the service's own self-assessment and the areas for consideration identified by the team are being consolidated into the existing service improvement plan. This plan would form the basis of the business plan for Achieving for Children.

The Panel were informed that the peer team was large with a lot of experience consisting of the following people:

- Lead peer – Charlotte Ramsden, Strategic Director for Children & Adult Services, Salford City Council
- Member peer – Councillor David Simmonds, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services, LB of Hillingdon
- Operational peer (Review Analyst/Case Records Review/Audit Validation) – Karen Graham, Assistant Director of Social Care, Health & Wellbeing, Kent County Council
- Operational Peer – Jane Wilton, Head of Service, Looked After Children & Adoption, Solihull MBC
- Operational Peer – Pat Elliott, Independent Consultant
- Health Peer – Lynne Tyblewski, Health Visitor, Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust
- Police Peer – DCI David Newsome, Lead for Safeguarding Children, Hertfordshire Police
- Shadow Peer – Louise Smith, Adviser, Children & Young People, LGA
- Review Manager – Jill Emery, LGA

The presentation showed both the strengths and areas for consideration for effective practice, service delivery and listening to the voice of the child, some examples being:

Strengths; being evidence that child protection plans being increasingly SMART and timely, strong safeguarding practices across health visiting, school nursing, midwifery and Accident & Emergency and Pod working is improving consistency for CYP & families. These were just a few of the examples in the presentation.

Areas for further consideration were feedback to partners needs strengthening, agreed and consistent use of PARIS and improve the quality, frequency and recording of supervision. Again further examples were available in the presentation.

With regards to the outcomes, impact and performance management stream of the review the Panel were shown that some of the strengths were as follows (but not inclusive):

- Commitment to ensuring stability in management roles.
- Evidence of routine performance data being available and increasing member focus on performance.
- Senior management commitment to improve performance.
- Evidence of child protection plans being increasingly SMART and child outcome focussed.

Whilst areas for further consideration were:

- Stronger focus on outcomes for children
- Compliance with performance and practice expectations is inconsistent and lacks supervisory enforcement.
- Need to ensure consistent application of quality assurance framework and escalation policy.
- Need to develop a robust learning loop from performance, audits, reflective supervision and appraisal.

With regards to the working together the Panel were informed that there were excellent of collaborative and transparent working with Health and Police, evidence of shared report and planning activity across local boards and partnerships as well as a strong relationship across the school family with the local authority. It was noted that there was some anxiety regarding the transfer to Achieving For Children.

With regards to the Councils vision, strategy and leadership theme it was noted that there was an ambitious and innovative senior political leadership with leaders being visible and accessible.

The Panel were shown that the key messages from the review were:

- Political and managerial commitment to Achieving for Children.
- Keeping your partners close.
- Keeping children at the heart of everything you do.
- Ensure required performance and standards are fully embedded across services.
- Streamline processes to support effective co-ordination and planning that meets the needs of children.
- Enhance stability and support staff during this time of change.

The Panel noted that the Council was still awaiting the final report.

The Panel felt that it was an excellent idea to hold the peer review as it had been a very useful exercise. It was noted that the final report would be in the public domain.

Resolved unanimously: that the Panel noted the report.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion takes place on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1-7 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 8.30 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....