

## SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FORUM

THURSDAY, 14 OCTOBER 2021

PRESENT: Councillors Stuart Carroll (Chair), David Coppinger (Vice-Chairman) and Catherine Del Campo

Also in attendance: Councillor John Baldwin, Councillor Maureen Hunt and Judith Street

Officers: Mark Beeley, Clive Haines, Rebecca Askew, Helen Huntley and Alasdair Whitelaw

### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received. The Chairman was running late so Councillor Coppinger began the meeting as Chairman.

### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

### MINUTES

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021 were approved as an accurate record.**

### MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN RBWM SCHOOLS

Rebecca Askew, Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist - Wellbeing, gave a presentation on mental health and wellbeing within schools. There was a rising prevalence of mental health difficulties, with one in eight children having mental health needs. There was also a rising level of suicide in under 25s. Over the past few years, a significant amount of progress had been made. There was more recognition that there was an overlap between mental health and physical illness. In RBWM, the universal offer of youth services had been reduced but were doing well in the family hubs. The team had seen an increase in the number of eating disorders and disordered eating, which was where a child could possibly be eating the same thing each day and therefore not getting a balanced diet. High numbers of referrals were happening for anxiety.

Looking at the national data, over 190,000 18 year olds were referred to children and young people's mental health services between April 2021 and June 2021, this was an increase when compared to the previous year. An increase in 80% of young people had been referred to crisis care. Recently a survey had been undertaken on health and wellbeing, which had been run by Oxford University and was sent out to RBWM schools who could then help children fill it out. The data from this survey could be used to help develop plans and inform the local transformation plan. Questions covered things like bullying and access to services, it had been clear from the survey results that a number of children preferred not to access mental health services in a school setting and would use the internet after school instead. Of all the year groups, students from Years 11 and 12 seemed to be most affected during the first survey.

Rebecca Askew explained that she managed the Wellbeing team of therapists who could offer help and support to young people, the only requirement was that they attended a school in RBWM. Each wellbeing practitioner was linked to a school in the borough so they could offer

advice and support on an ad-hoc basis. They also supported children and young people 1 to 1 and in small groups through the Early Help Hub and Social Care. The RBWM wellbeing team had been decreasing in size but referrals through early help had doubled during the past year. Waiting times for the 'getting help' team were favourable in RBWM compared to its other East Berkshire neighbours Slough and Bracknell. Mental health support teams were in place at 14 different schools across the borough which had been launched in September. Individual and group support, as well as peer mentoring, would be offered and the teams would be hosting whole school assemblies and embedding a whole school approach for mental health and wellbeing in each school.

Councillor Coppinger thanked Rebecca Askew for the presentation and asked for the presentation to be circulated after the meeting to the Forum.

**ACTION – Mark Beeley to circulate presentation to the School Improvement Forum.**

Councillor Del Campo commented on the loss of the universal offer and asked if those that were left were coming through the wellbeing services.

Rebecca Askew explained that the wellbeing team was separate to the family hub, she was specifically talking about the youth service which did not impact on other activities like summer programmes.

Councillor Del Campo made reference to a graph which had been shown as part of the presentation, where the number was 0. She asked if this meant that no treatment had taken place at this time.

Rebecca Askew said that during the lockdowns the data was not totally accurate but there were significant drops at these times.

Councillor Del Campo asked what the team needed from RBWM.

Rebecca Askew said that there was a huge amount of positive development which would take time to move through the system. Clear communication to parents and carers was important, so that young people knew where and how they could access services. Sports facilities and funding for these was very beneficial for wellbeing and mental health. Staff wellbeing was also something that should be focused on, teaching staff had worked hard over the course of the pandemic.

Councillor Coppinger handed the Chairman role back to Councillor Carroll.

The Chairman apologised for joining the meeting late but arrived at the start of the presentation. He said that the themes discussed in the presentation were a critical priority and supporting mental health, particularly with younger people. It was pleasing to see that the waiting times were lower compared to other areas, but these were still too high. The Chairman asked what was specifically needed to drive down the waiting times and what problems were occurring which meant that some had to wait longer than others.

Rebecca Askew said that there was a difficulty with staff leaving and employing new staff, this was a national problem. This was coupled with a huge increase in referrals. CAMHS were working on their wait list times and were looking at how young people could be supported whilst on a waiting list.

The Chairman asked for Rebecca Askew's view on the health system and the education system working well together so that young people were being helped as much as possible to avoid disruption to their education.

Rebecca Askew said it was important to meet both educational and mental health needs. There had been an improvement in the connection between these two systems, things like the mental health support teams in schools would help to develop this link further.

## SEMH PROGRAMME IMPACT WITHIN OUR SCHOOLS

Alasdair Whitelaw, SEMH Coordinator, gave a presentation on SEMH programme impact within schools across RBWM. The social, emotional and mental health project had been running since 2019 and was due to end at Easter 2022. It was a statutory requirement for schools to make reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of children with complex SEMH. The project was developed as there had been a rise in the number of exclusions, particularly at primary school. Alasdair Whitelaw had spent some time in different primary schools understanding the behavioural needs of some children and the communication links between teachers and parents. In total, the team had visited 21 schools which was 21 families who had received specialist support and help. Some funding had recently been secured which would allow for a secondary model to be trialled across six schools over 2021 and 2022. The most positive outcome of the trial was that no child involved was excluded. Exclusions had come down as a result of the project but had not been eliminated entirely. Looking at some of the feedback from headteachers on the project, 16 of the 21 said that the outcomes of the project were fully met, while 3 headteachers believed that the outcomes had been partly met, while the other two still had the project ongoing.

Judith Street, Headteacher at Queen Anne First School, explained that the project had helped a child who was a concern and had been excluded previously. As a result of the project, there had been a significant change in the child's behaviour and also the schools strength and confidence in supporting children with their own individual needs. A really important aspect of the project was the link between the parents and the school which was guided by the coach, who was part of the project. Judith Street thanked Alasdair Whitelaw and his team for all their help and support with the project.

Alasdair Whitelaw said that the project had also allowed a license to be purchased for all schools in RBWM to have an online Boxall profile, which was an assessment tool that identified strengths and weaknesses for each child. Progress could be tracked and RBWM was the first borough in the country to be offering this to all its schools. An SEMH email had been set up which allowed headteachers to email the team directly for any children who were at risk of exclusion, within 24 hours advice could be offered. Alasdair Whitelaw concluded by explaining that a paper would be taken to the Schools Forum in November 2021 with recommendations derived from the working group of headteachers which would outline the potential ongoing services to be agreed and funded.

The Chairman said that he was pleased to hear about the positive feedback from headteachers, the project had made a positive difference and it continued to do so. He thanked Alasdair Whitelaw for his leadership on the project. The Chairman asked what the challenges were of integrating services together and asked if more services could be integrated going forward.

Alasdair Whitelaw said that the ability to discuss cases virtually had proved to be beneficial. The Early Help hub was able to pick up cases, but there was always more that could be done. Data protection was an issue and often it could be hard to get the detail from the wealth of information that was available. Alasdair Whitelaw said that he would like to see communication improved further across different services.

Helen Huntley, SEND Consultant, said that there was more cross service discussion now than there had been previously. Governance was also much improved and issues were discussed at various meetings which involved multiple teams.

The Chairman suggested that Alasdair Whitelaw and Judith Street could be invited to one of his Cabinet Member briefings to discuss the detail further.

**ACTION – Clive Haines to invite Alasdair Whitelaw and Judith Street to the next Cabinet Member briefing.**

Councillor Del Campo said that it was good that children were being given extra support from an early age. She asked how behaviour could be evaluated that did not meet the behaviour threshold.

Alasdair Whitelaw said the difference could be made on those children in younger age groups. There were performance indicators which were reported back on, with suspensions in schools something that would be considered.

Helen Huntley said that the Boxall profile would be useful as it would identify the areas of need and evaluate the data using the profile. The team would have access to this data, with the schools permission, which would help inform development going forward.

Councillor Del Campo asked what happened from here, after the paper went to the Schools Forum.

The Chairman explained that the paper would be considered by the Schools Forum and would also come through to the Cabinet Member briefing. A decision would then be made on whether a Cabinet paper was needed. A report could also either be brought back to the School Improvement Forum or the Adults, Children and Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor Hunt, as Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, said it would be good to have the report considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The next meeting was considering the Budget but an additional meeting could be required to consider this and other items on the work programme.

**ACTION – Clive Haines and Councillor Carroll to discuss the report and see whether something can be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel work programme.**

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting would be on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2022, starting at 5pm.

The meeting, which began at 5.00 pm, finished at 6.40 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....