

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 6 DECEMBER 2018

PRESENT: Councillors Marion Mills (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Nicola Pryer, Edward Wilson, Wesley Richards and Charles Hollingsworth

Also in attendance: Paul Louden

Officers: Kevin McDaniel and Andy Carswell

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Quick and Hilary Hall.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Pryer declared a personal interest in item 4 as her two children attended schools in Windsor. Mr Louden also declared a personal interest in item 4 as he was a governor at a school that was mentioned in the report.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on October 16th 2018 be approved as a true and accurate record.

Arising from the minutes, Cllr Wilson asked if the Local Government Ombudsman had been contacted regarding the misleading figures in the report discussed at the meeting. The Director of Children's Services said he did not believe that this had been done, and would ensure this was actioned.

SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2020/21 AND CO-ORDINATED ADMISSIONS SCHEME 2020/21

The Director of Children's Services informed Members that the proposals were to continue with the existing admission arrangements, as the Council was already meeting the mandatory provisions set out by the Secretary of State. Local Authorities had been asked to consider giving priority to formerly looked after children when considering school allocation places, but the Council was already able to do this through its social and medical criteria.

Responding to questions from Cllr Wilson, the Director of Children's Services said there were no noticeable trends with regards to Published Admission Numbers reducing at Windsor schools. He also said there had been an increase in the number of in-year transfers, although these tended not to go to an admissions appeal.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That Members note the report and:

- i) Approve, and thereby determine, the RBWM Admission Arrangements for 2020/21 set out at Appendix 1.
- ii) Approve, and thereby determine, the RBWM Co-ordinated Admissions scheme for 2020/21 set out at Appendix 2.

SCHOOLS CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2019/20

The Director of Children's Services explained that the proposals made in the draft Schools Capital Programme, as part of the wider Budget, had been put forward before the amount of funding that was being made available through the maintenance grant from Government was known. A list of priority schemes had been listed for Members in the report appendix. Schemes had been prioritised following assessment in the first instance from building surveys commissioned by the authority; these were then presented to the Director of Children's Services and discussed with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services at a Lead Member briefing. Schemes had been prioritised where there was an immediate need for works to take place, or taking no action presented risks to the health and wellbeing of pupils.

Cllr Wilson asked if there had been any discussions with ward members regarding choosing the priority schemes. The Director of Children's Services said that ward members would get involved if a school disagreed with the results of any survey carried out. There was also a tendency for ward members to suggest the development of new facilities at schools, rather than raising concerns about maintenance. Cllr Wilson asked if any of the proposed works were being done prior to any of the schools converting to Academies. The Director of Children's Services said he was not aware of any schools planning to convert.

Cllr Hollingsworth asked if any assurances could be given there would be no impact on youth centres caused by the budget. The Director of Children's Services explained that youth centres were not covered by the Schools Capital Programme, and this was provided for in the main budget setting process, so he was not in a position to give any information about future funding.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That Members note the report and approve:

- i) **The Children's Services 2019-20 capital bids - to be included in the overall 2019-20 capital programme, subject to any changes that may be required to the Condition list of schemes following the grant allocation announcement and final approval at Council**
- ii) **The listed schemes being put out to tender**
- iii) **Variations to the list of condition schemes to be delegated to the Lead Member and Director of Children Services following the Schools Condition Allocation grant confirmation by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.**

VERBAL UPDATE ON OUTCOME OF OFSTED FOCUSED VISIT

Members were reminded that the last Ofsted inspection of the Council's Children's Services had taken place in May 2015, with a judgement of requiring improvement to be good across all areas. Since that time Ofsted had changed how it carried out inspections, using two intermediate activities: an Annual Conversation and a Focused Visit. Members were told that Ofsted held the Annual Conversation with Council directors in January, where it was suggested that a Focused Visit rather than a full inspection would be most helpful in 2018.

The Ofsted Focused Visit took place in the Royal Borough on November 27th and 28th with a focus on the Front Door services. These were the single point of access, Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the Duty & Assessment Service. This focus allowed Ofsted to assess if Ofsted were confident in the Council's ability to manage risks to children. In this focus visit, the inspectors spent almost all of their onsite time with frontline staff and asked them to show them the relevant policies and strategies in action so that the inspectors could see first hand the quality of social work. Their feedback was a narrative letter and there was no graded judgement,

The Director of Children's Services said that staff talked to the inspection team in positive terms about the supportive culture they worked in, which meant they felt supported when making difficult decisions about families. Staff demonstrated they were able to challenge each other, and were able to work with partners in a more open and constructive way. It was noted that morale among staff was high. The inspection team noted that more work needed to be

done by middle management to ensure greater consistency of management oversight, although this had been identified by the Council in its self assessment carried out prior to the inspection.

Members were told that feedback on the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub was positive. A daily meeting had been viewed by the inspection team, which had been assessed as being appropriately challenging for all agencies involved. Staff were making good decisions and were able to work well across all agencies. Families felt more confident that their queries were being handled in a timely manner. An area for improvement was to provide further information on available options for families who did not meet the necessary thresholds for support. Overall, Ofsted noted that the MASH service was effective.

The Director of Children's Services informed Members that the self assessment of the Duty of Assessment Service identified a number of challenges. Seven of the eight members of the team were agency staff as there had been difficulty in maintaining a permanent workforce. The increased demand for support during the summer had resulted in high caseloads for some workers and the Council had increased resources in November as a result. The local marketplace for agency workers had also been challenging with increasing costs and declining quality. This led to a turnover of agency social workers which meant some children had seen more than one social worker during the course of a 45-day assessment, and this had undermined their confidence.

Ofsted recognised this assessment as being accurate and that the Council's response has been appropriate. Ofsted raised concerns that some staff were unfamiliar with the computer systems used (known as the ICS) and that the system did not support managers with clear information or front line staff with an automatic workflow. There were proposals to move to a new system that is used across Achieving for Children and widely across England. There is a 2019/20 capital programme recommendation to provide for this, which will be considered during budget setting. The Director of Children's Services cautioned that it was likely to take up to 18 months to fully implement and the current system would continue to operate and require extra management effort in the meanwhile.

Overall it was noted that while there had been a decline in the quality of assessment services since the last inspection, there had been improvement in all areas visited since August 2017. No need for an urgent inspection had been identified and further improvements were needed and plans are in place to tackle those areas. Ofsted were expected to visit next for the Annual Conversation scheduled for March 2019.

Cllr Pryer asked about the makeup of temporary and permanent staff in all of the teams, as concerns had been raised about the Duty of Assessment Service. The Director of Children's Services said that 18 months ago 50 per cent of professional staff across all areas were agency staff, but this had now been significantly reduced to about 10%. However that hid the challenge in the Duty and Assessment team. Steps to rectify this had been identified and were in the process of being implemented. Two permanent staff have started in that team during November and a further job offer had been made.

Cllr Wilson asked how the results of the Council's inspection compared to other Berkshire authorities. The Director of Children's Services said that Slough Borough Council was monitored directly by the Department for Education and Reading Borough Council had set up an organisation similar to a Trust, which meant they were not assessed in the same way as the Royal Borough. The only other authority to have a recent focus visit was Wokingham, with West Berkshire expecting a similar visit. As the letters were not graded it was hard to compare directly. The key issue, as ever, is the correlation between the findings and one's self assessment and plans. The Director of Children's Services stated his belief that the Royal Borough is in a strong position and the findings of the visit reflect the growing confidence of the management and leadership that children in the Borough receive an effective service.

WORK PROGRAMME

It was agreed that the update on the Girl's Policy Forum would be moved to the March meeting. Members noted the contents of the Work Programme.

The meeting, which began at 6.35 pm, finished at 7.16 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....