

ADULTS, CHILDREN AND HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 20 JUNE 2019

PRESENT: Councillors Simon Bond, Carole Da Costa, Maureen Hunt, Julian Sharpe and John Story

Also in attendance: Councillor Stuart Carroll

Officers: Andy Carswell, Hilary Hall, Kevin McDaniel and Anna Robinson

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

Cllr Story nominated Cllr Sharpe as Chairman of the Panel. This was seconded by Cllr Hunt and unanimously agreed by Members. Cllr Sharpe confirmed that, as per the terms of the Constitution, he would resign from his role as Vice Chairman of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Cllr Sharpe nominated Cllr Story as Vice Chairman of the Panel. This was seconded by Cllr Hunt. Cllr Da Costa nominated Cllr Bond as Vice Chairman of the Panel. This was seconded by Cllr Bond. Cllr Story was voted as Vice Chairman of the Panel.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Hunt declared a personal interest as her daughter worked as a teacher, and would shortly be moving to the Royal Borough.

Cllr Da Costa declared a personal interest as she was employed by the NHS.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS PANELS

The contents of the minutes of the former Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on March 21st 2019 and the former Adult Services and Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on March 27th 2019 were both noted by Members.

APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTEEES

Members' attention was drawn to the names of the proposed co-optees in the supplementary agenda. The Director of Children's Services informed Members that the Oxford Diocese was responsible for around 15 per cent of school staff in the Royal Borough, with around a third of schools being faith-based. He added that the two governor representatives were both well known, and there was the additional benefit of the secondary school representative being a governor at an Academy school. The Director of Children's Services told Members that he had spoken to the Portsmouth Diocese – responsible for Catholic primary schools in the Royal Borough – the previous day and it had been agreed that Catherine Hobbs would act as their representative, and this would be confirmed once all of the relevant paperwork had been completed.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That Mark Jervis, Derek Moss, Tony Wilson and Catherine Hobbs be appointed as co-optees to the Panel.

Members were told that there was no proposed representative from the Regional Schools Commissioner. This co-optee position had been added to the Terms of Reference four years ago to help aid the transition when a large number of Royal Borough schools were converting to Academy status and a co-optee had been appointed; however they did not subsequently attend any meetings of the former Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The Director of Children's Services stated it was appropriate to continue to ask for a Regional Schools Commissioner representative as almost half of all the schools in the Royal Borough were now Academies. However he had had no response to two letters he had sent to the Commission in the previous four weeks. The Director of Children's Services explained that the Regional Schools Commissioner generally only attended meetings when particular issues had been raised, and this was not the case in the Royal Borough.

Members felt that it would be appropriate for elected Councillors to contact the RSC and ask for a nominee. The Chairman stated that he would write to the RSC on the Panel's behalf.

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Chairman stated his belief that scrutiny was one of the most important functions of the Council and said the Panel should be rigorous in challenging the Executive, in order to deliver a high quality service to residents. Cllr Hunt thanked officers for their hard work in delivering services to Borough residents. Members were informed that the Terms of Reference were available to view on the Council's website as part of the Constitution document.

The Clerk outlined some of the key alterations to the Terms of Reference. Members were told that there was now more of a focus on the Panel deciding for themselves which items they wanted to be included on the work programme to determine what needed to be scrutinised in greater depth. Cabinet reports would no longer be automatically referred to the Panel but a request for a referral could still be made. However no more than two reports per Cabinet could be called in. Members were also informed that the monthly Finance Report would no longer be automatically referred to the Panel, but all reports would be made public to Members.

The Director of Children's Services informed Members that there were other avenues where reports could be considered, and gave the example of the School Improvement Forum.

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Strategy and Performance Manager reminded Members that a number of strategic priorities were set out in the 2017-2021 Council Plan. Of relevance to this Panel were the priorities of ensuring healthy, skilled and independent residents and of ensuring safe and vibrant communities.

Members were told that quarterly performance updates relevant to each Panel would be presented at each meeting as part of a wider performance management framework. This would be presented to provide more context for figures compared to previously, following feedback from Members. For example figures would be expressed in percentage and numeric terms, as some cohort numbers in statistics were small so a slight difference to numbers could significantly vary percentages. Benchmark figures that would enable comparisons between the Royal Borough and national figures to be made would also be provided. This would particularly be the case with the Adults, Children and Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel as a number of performance measures were statutory so the information would be easier to collate and contrast as there was greater consistency in recording data across different councils. Members were told that going forward the performance updates would report on the issues that had been identified as being the areas of highest priority.

WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

The Vice Chairman requested presentations be given to Members to update them on the progress of the new Heatherwood Hospital and Ascot Medical Centre. It was agreed that the Heatherwood presentation could be given at the September meeting and the Ascot Medical Centre would be considered at the January meeting.

Regarding the proposed Changes to Universal Services item, it was agreed that it would be appropriate to schedule this for the January meeting as by then it would no longer be a Part II item. It was not possible to schedule the other two proposed items, on Long Term Funding of Social Care and Impact on School Funding Changes, as these were dependant on the publication of information from central government and the timescale for this was still unknown.

EDUCATION STANDARDS REPORT

The Director of Children's Services introduced the item and explained it was also due to be discussed at the School Improvement Forum the following week.

Members were told that 91 per cent of schools in the Royal Borough were rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. The Director of Children's Services stated his belief that schools were maintaining standards, despite recent press reports that standards had fallen at some schools. Members were told that some schools were exempt from full inspections for a certain number of years unless there was a significant deterioration in standards or a serious safeguarding issue reported, although there it was noted that some schools would prefer to receive another inspection in order to be reassured they were continuing to meet standards.

It had not been possible for any Members to look at the exam results of schools in the Royal Borough until now because they were not available until February at the earliest; the next scheduled Cabinet meeting where they were eligible for discussion was during Purdah. The figures showed that children in Royal Borough schools were performing above the national average at all assessed age groups, placing the Borough in the top 20 per cent of performers nationally. Attainment levels of pupils with special educational needs were also above average when compared with national figures.

Of some concern were the attainment levels of disadvantaged pupils. Attainment levels were lower than the national average even though there was a low number of disadvantaged pupils in Royal Borough schools. Tackling this issue had been a priority but there had not been a significant improvement in attainment levels. The Director of Children's Services said this was a sensitive issue as some disadvantaged families in the Royal Borough did not want additional support as it would make any perceived social stigma worse and make their children stand out as needing additional support. It was noted that similar issues existed in the other Berkshire council areas. One way of removing the stigma associated with receiving free school meals that had been suggested was for all children to use a cashless system, with cards used by disadvantaged children being topped up by the Council. The Director of Children's Services said that schools had been working together to eliminate methods of bad practice regarding disadvantaged or Pupil Premium children and that they were keen to engage with these families, as more funding would be made available to the school to help support them. This topic would be a focus of the next School Improvement Forum meeting.

The Vice Chairman asked about the seven schools that had an Ofsted rating of requiring improvement. The Director of Children's Services explained that one of these was the pupil referral unit at Haybrook College in Slough, which catered for pupils who had been permanently excluded from mainstream education. The Council had paid for 30 out of the 120 secondary education places there to be allocated to Royal Borough pupils, and the Ofsted rating came from an inspection that was carried out prior to this arrangement being implemented. The Director of Children's Services stated he was comfortable that Haybrook College was on its way to being classified as good. Of the remaining six, the Director of Children's Services stated his belief that three had demonstrated they would be rated good if they received an Ofsted inspection soon. Cllr Hunt stated she was delighted to hear one of

these schools was Bisham Primary, which was in her ward and was now, in her opinion, a successful school. Of the other three schools, two had changed their leadership team in the past year and their changes would take time to be embedded.

Regarding permanent exclusions, the Director of Children's Services stated that these were on the increase and more work was being done to establish the reasons behind this. The Council was responsible for finding a school for an excluded pupil and the link with Haybrook College had been established in order to meet the Council's statutory duties as there was no pupil referral unit in the Royal Borough. Pupils who had been excluded for carrying knives had been mentioned as an issue, as many schools had a zero tolerance policy and would exclude a pupil for a first offence regardless of any mitigation. Some schools had accepted an offer from Thames Valley Police to invite a theatre group to discuss the topic. Members were told that the cost of funding places for excluded pupils was budgeted for, but this came from a ring-fenced budget and there were concerns that increasing numbers of exclusions would impact on specialist care in mainstream schools. However it was felt that failing to provide a budget for excluded pupils would expose them to greater risks. Members were told that in some cases the Council was responsible for funding transport for pupils to Haybrook.

The Vice Chairman noted that Lewisham Council had been identified as an authority to share good practice with regarding disadvantaged pupils. Members were told that Lewisham had a high number of disadvantage children so the council there was able to adopt a more systemic approach to tackling the issue, compared to the small cohort in the Royal Borough.

Cllr Bond asked about pupils with undiagnosed special educational needs, and if there were concerns they were not getting the specialist support they needed. The Director of Children's Services said £150,000 was being spent from the early years block each year to see if any pupils needed additional support, and staff were beginning to notice an increase in the number of pupils being given an EHCP. However the budget in the high needs block was comparatively low. Some schools had no SEN pupils whereas others had up to 30 per cent of their pupils who had special educational needs. Peer reviews had started to be implemented to ensure a fairer distribution of pupils across all schools. Of the 900 pupils aged 2-25 who had special educational needs, 300 were in mainstream schools and the rest were in locations that gave specialist provision.

The Chairman asked if consideration had been given to building an additional specialist school in the Borough. The Director of Children's Services said that consideration for the specialist support provided for pupils in the Royal Borough needed to be balanced against the level of support that would be needed going forward, in cases where the children had complex needs and would require specialist care for several years into the future, and the pressures this would place on resources.

Members thanked officers for the level of detail in the report.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of the future meetings of the Panel were agreed as September 19th 2019, January 29th 2020 and April 23rd 2020.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 8.00 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....