

PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 17 April 2023

Present: Councillors Sayonara Luxton (Chairman), Maureen Hunt (Vice-Chairman), Clive Baskerville, Gerry Clark, Carole Da Costa, Neil Knowles, Julian Sharpe, John Story and Amy Tisi

Also in attendance: Mark Jervis

Also in attendance virtually: Councillor David Coppinger

Officers: Mark Beeley, Kevin McDaniel and Lin Ferguson

Officers in attendance virtually: Danny Gomm

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Del Campo and Tony Wilson.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

Minutes

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 19th January 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

FUEL Project

Lin Ferguson, Executive Director of Children's Services and Education, introduced the item and said that the Holiday Activity and Food Programme was to provide fun activities and nutritious food for disadvantaged young people. The programme was referred to as FUEL in RBWM (Feed Ur Everyday Lives), which was a choice made by the young people who were part of the programme.

Danny Gomm, Family Hub Manager, provided an update on the programme in 2022. Due to the success of the programme in 2021, it was extended for a further three years until 2024. Local authorities were able to use up to 15% of their funding to provide activities for children who were not in receipt of free school meals but could benefit from being part of the programme. The scheme was run for 4 hours a day, 4 days a week, for 4 weeks in the summer, 1 week at Easter and 1 week at Christmas. The objectives of FUEL included:

- To eat more healthy.
- To be more active.
- To take part in engaging and enriching activities.
- To be safe and not feel isolated.
- To have a greater knowledge of health and nutrition.
- To have a greater knowledge of support services available.

Danny Gomm said that RBWM had been initially allocated £296,260 to deliver the FUEL programme in 2022. There had been an increase in the number of children receiving free

school meals compared to the previous year, therefore RBWM were allocated an additional £13,860 which took the total allocation to £310,120. A FUEL coordinator had been recruited to oversee the day to day running of the programme. Extended eligibility of the programme included children in care, refugees, children with an education health and care plan, and young carers. It was important that there was no stigma and every effort was put in to ensuring that FUEL funded children were not highlighted to other children. For some activities, RBWM had provided provision for 5 days a week with some providers as missing out on a key day was not in the best interests of the children. Approximately 95% of the spaces available to children were booked, however there were a number of no shows or cancellations due to illness. A total of 832 individual children had attended the programme across 2022. Feedback had been very positive from families, with at least a 4 out of 5 rating being achieved on the booking process, staff, food and the activities on offer. Over 8,300 spaces had been provided to families and travel had also been provided for family hub run offsite trips. Attendance rates had been high for the summer and Christmas programmes, with some additional space being booked with some providers due to high demand.

Danny Gomm considered some of the challenges of the programme:

- The attendance rates of those children that had booked onto sessions was still lower than hoped for.
- The number of eligible children was known but the demand for spaces was not.
- More provision was needed for children with special educational needs and ensuring that providers were able to meet the needs of this group of children.
- Providing a diverse programme that engaged 12-16 year olds.
- Ensuring that funding was spread across the programme.
- Promotion of the programme, some schools were more effective than others.
- Checking eligibility of those accessing free school meals.
- Managing families understanding of the programme and expectations.

Danny Gomm said that some recommendations had been put in place. This included developing gold, silver and bronze quality marks for providers, developing the right level of SEN support and considering recruiting casual FUEL staff who could provide 1-1 support. It would also be useful for the FUEL team to have access to the remaining schools free school meals system to help check eligibility more effectively.

Councillor Clark asked if any events were run in his ward of Bisham and Cookham at Longridge Activity Centre.

Danny Gomm confirmed that the centre was not part of the programme currently. Providers could apply and RBWM could then decide which providers they would be funding, considering the criteria. The centre had received the information on the programme.

Councillor Clark asked if he could be copied in on communication between the council and the centre on being part of the FUEL programme.

Danny Gomm said that he was happy to do this, the centre would target the 12-16 age range which was something that RBWM needed more providers of. A number of providers on the programme were small local businesses.

ACTION – Danny Gomm to copy in Councillor Clark on any further correspondence about the FUEL programme with Longridge Activity Centre.

Councillor Sharpe congratulated Danny Gomm on the programme for the success over the past year. He asked of all of the challenges identified, which one was the most important.

Danny Gomm felt that the increase in provision for special education needs was the main focus. Progress had been made at Easter but there was still work to do.

Councillor Sharpe asked if the provision of the programme was distributed equally across the borough.

Danny Gomm said that based on the information that the council had on where the children lived, the funding was equitable for each area.

Councillor Tisi asked how many children were eligible for free school meals in RBWM. She was informed that it was approximately 2,900 children.

Councillor Tisi continued by asking if all of these eligible children wanted to take part in the programme, was this possible considering the capacity and resource.

Danny Gomm confirmed that there was enough space for each child to participate in one day out of the four provided during each school holiday. The council did not have the capacity to provide a space for all eligible children for all the days which the programme ran. More spaces could be provided if needed, based on the current demand.

Councillor Tisi noted that the 95% uptake in available of spaces was good to see, she asked if there were any groups which were not taking up the offer.

Danny Gomm was not aware of any gaps, with the extended eligibility criteria there had been a good mix of children on the programme.

Councillor Tisi commented on the lack of a central register for children who were eligible for free school meals, it seemed the council knew how many children there were but not how to contact the families.

Kevin McDaniel, Executive Director of Adult Services and Health, explained that families gave consent directly to the school to gain free school meals. This was because the schools were funded directly from the government rather than through the council.

Councillor C Da Costa asked how the formula for the funding of free schools meals was worked out.

Danny Gomm was unsure how the funding was worked out, he said that funding was provided to the school that the child attended, rather than the area that they lived.

Councillor C Da Costa asked if the young people enjoyed the healthy food which was provided.

Danny Gomm explained that they had not initially but once they had been encouraged to try healthy foods the majority of young people had enjoyed them. There had not been any feedback received where families had expressed concern because their children had not been eating the food provided.

Councillor C Da Costa asked what more needed to be done to stop non-attendance and if there was anything that the Panel could do to help with that.

Danny Gomm said that families needed to be aware that there was a limited amount of money, he did not want to ban families from booking as this was not fair on the children. It was a national challenge, RBWM was fairly good at attendance overall.

Councillor C Da Costa asked if the funding capacity for children not on free school meals had been used.

Danny Gomm said that a good amount of the 15% additional funding had been used on the programme, it showed that there was a need for the extended offer.

The Chairman suggested that a warning system could be used, for example a 'yellow card' could be used for consistent non-attendance. She asked what plans officers had to address the challenges that had been outlined in the presentation.

Danny Gomm said a warning system had been considered, but it had been decided that it was likely to be the parents who decided not to come rather than the children themselves. Another option was to ask for a deposit which would be returned following attendance. However, some families would struggle to pay the deposit and this would create another barrier to the programme. The team were able to have stern but professional conversations with parents who consistently did not attend booked sessions. On addressing the challenges, the team had been contacting providers on SEN provision and being proactive. There were plans in place to address some of the challenges identified ahead of the summer programme. The team were considering how to make it more attractive for schools to become part of the national free school meals database, which would save admin time and also benefit families.

Councillor Hunt congratulated officers on the FUEL programme, which had gone from strength to strength. She asked how many SEN children there were in the borough and how many had been part of the programme.

Danny Gomm said that he could find this out after the meeting.

ACTION – Danny Gomm to confirm how many SEN children there were in RBWM and how many had been attending activities as part of the FUEL programme.

Mark Jervis asked if any metrics were used to consider the positive effects of children from the programme.

Danny Gomm said that it was difficult to measure but there was an anxiety group which was for children leaving primary school and moving to secondary school. The team received a lot of qualitative feedback from parents, it was something that could be looked at to gain some more quantitative data on the programme.

Adult Social Care Reforms

Kevin McDaniel reminded the Panel that last summer he had explained that some major adult social care reforms were planned, this item was an update on these reforms. A significant number of the reforms had been paused, the original launch date had been October 2024 but this had now been pushed back to October 2025. The pause delayed the introduction of a lifetime spending cap, the provision of an online care account for each resident and an increase in the top threshold of assets from £23,000 to £100,000. The introduction of an inspectorate for adult social care would now be a phased introduction from April 2023.

The Care Quality Commission would start by reviewing publicly available data and published documentary evidence to publish a report at an overall national level. From September, the Care Quality Commission planned to complete an initial formal assessment for all local authorities to establish a starting point. Formal assessments would not include observations and would involve data collection in the form of interviews and case tracking. There were four main themes:

- Working with people
- Providing support
- Ensuring safety
- Leadership

RBWM had a quality assurance working group meeting monthly to provide assurance using the framework as a guide. Audits were taking place in Optalis and a monthly Exec Summary was provided to the Director of Adult Social Care to oversee progress. Using the self-

assessment framework, surveys were being sent to all Optalis staff to complete. Theme by theme staff were also being asked to rate practise. This data would be used to build a report which would be ready internally in September, the intention was to repeat this process each quarter to show highlighted areas of work and make changes.

Councillor C Da Costa welcomed the reforms and the plans that RBWM had in place, she felt that it would be good for residents. She said that the reforms were at a high level, how would this affect a carer going to a residents home on a day to day basis.

Kevin McDaniel said that a number of adult social care staff were employed by separate organisations. However, there would be an opportunity to review care packages and the feedback loop would allow staff and carers to ensure that positive changes could be made to improve good practise.

Councillor C Da Costa suggested that advocates could be recruited from Optalis who could speak up for residents who were more vulnerable, this would allow direct concerns to be addressed.

Kevin McDaniel said it could be a useful way to engage further with the community, he was happy to take the suggestion forward.

Task and Finish Group Update - Domestic Abuse

Lin Ferguson said that the task and finish group had met and developed an action plan of what would be achieved. The group was at the information gathering stage and considering who were the best people to speak to. A list of questions was being drafted in preparation for speaking to witnesses. The Youth Council had also expressed an interest in being involved in the process. It was expected that the task and finish group could take a significant amount of time over the course of the next year.

Councillor Tisi added that the group were keen to explore different groups of people who had been affected by domestic abuse and ensuring that their views were represented. People with neurodiversity and the factor of being diagnosed or not diagnosed was an area the group also wished to explore.

Annual Scrutiny Report - Drafting Ideas

Mark Beeley, Principal Democratic Services Officer – Overview and Scrutiny, explained that each year a report was produced which would go to Full Council and highlighted the work of scrutiny over the past municipal year. The Panel were asked if there were any comments or areas they would like to see included in the annual report.

Panel Members were able to share comments for inclusion in the report by emailing Mark Beeley and the Chairman.

Work Programme

Councillor Sharpe said that he was interested in how the healthcare system operated across the borough, particularly interactions with Bracknell in the south of the borough.

Kevin McDaniel said that Bracknell Forest was part of the Frimley Integrated Care System, which meant that there should be system wide pieces which were consistent but place areas which would be different. The Integrated Care Board would be releasing the updated strategy and it could be worth inviting health and place leaders to a future meeting, this could be something to include in the September meeting.

ACTION – Kevin McDaniel to speak to health leaders to see if they would be able to attend a future Panel meeting.

Councillor Tisi suggested that the Panel could review whether Ukrainian families living in the borough were receiving the right level of support, healthcare and education.

The Chairman thanked all Panel Members and officers for their support and work over the course of the municipal year.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 8.30 pm

Chair.....

Date.....