

**ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE
5 MARCH 2014**

Present: Councillor T Jones (Chair)
Councillors Ballsdon, Eastwood, Eden, D Edwards, Ennis, Gavin, P Jones, McElligott, O'Connell, Orton, Rynn, Vickers (for part of item 29 and items 30 to 32) and Williams.

Apologies: Councillors Anderson and Ralph.

The Chair referred to the recent death of Jamie Chowdhary who had been a Reading Councillor from 2008 to 2012. The Committee stood in silence as a sign of respect.

26. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of 7 November 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

27. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meetings were submitted:

- Children's Safeguarding Panel, 21 November 2013
- Children's Trust Partnership Board, 26 November 2013 and 28 January 2014.

Resolved: - That the Minutes be noted.

28. LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD: ANNUAL REPORT

Avril Wilson, Director of Education, Adult and Children's Services, submitted a copy of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) Annual Report.

The report stated that the Reading LSCB had been operating within a challenging context over the previous year as the public sector and NHS had undergone significant changes due to shifts in political expectations and funding. This had impacted on many services including those delivered by the voluntary sector. New Working Together Guidance had presented a framework for child protection work with a renewed emphasis on the role of the LSCB in scrutinising and challenging local practice and there was a renewed focus on ensuring that children and families received help early before a crisis occurred.

The LSCB had seen evidence of a great deal of good practice in safeguarding across all agencies in Reading and of innovative practice in multi-agency work. Audits carried out by the LSCB during the year had given the Board a broad understanding of safeguarding practice relating to children who had parents with mental health issues, the core group for child protection planning, responses to the health needs of looked after children (LAC), cases where domestic abuse was present and self harming in young people. All audits had produced action plans for improvement.

In the previous year the Board had asked the Royal Berkshire Hospital Foundation Trust to introduce a system of performance management which would allow figures to be produced by area of origin of presentation of children to Accident and

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Emergency and this was now in place. The Board had also asked the Trust to ensure that case details of children given forensic sexual examinations at the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) were passed to relevant local authorities and this was also happening satisfactorily.

The report stated that further work was needed to raise standards across all agencies for people experiencing domestic violence. Training records needed to be maintained more robustly in all agencies in order for them to demonstrate compliance with minimum standards for safeguarding training and all agencies needed to commit resources to support staff to attend multi agency training on safeguarding, recognising the benefits to improved practice when staff trained together. Work had begun on reducing referrals into Children's Social Care and there had been a focus on child sexual exploitation during the previous year with a need for all agencies to improve their practice in this area.

The report included messages for a number of bodies such as Chief Executives and Directors, the children's workforce, Thames Valley Police (TVP), Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust, Clinical Commissioning Groups and the following messages for local politicians:

- They must ensure that reductions in staffing did not jeopardise the allocation of effective resources to safeguarding and promoting children's welfare;
- They must continue to promote inter agency working particularly through the Health and Wellbeing Board;
- Through their links with local communities they must ensure community concerns about safeguarding and children's welfare were brought to the attention of all those with duties to respond.

The report explained that an Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspection had taken place in March 2013 and in the resulting report the following recommendations had been made specific to the LSCB:

- Reading Safeguarding Children Board (RSCB), in conjunction with TVP, improve the current police arrangements for screening and assuring the quality of domestic abuse referrals to Children's Social Care;
- RSCB to review the application of the threshold criteria in practice within agencies to ensure agreed levels were understood and being consistently applied;
- The Council and RSCB to establish effective arrangements to enable children and young people to participate in meaningful ways in protection planning processes.

Avril Wilson informed the Committee that a large volume of referrals were still being generated by TVP, generally around domestic violence, and despite having written to the Chief Constable the quality of the referrals remained poor and the conversion rate low. Incidents had been referred where there had been no question of domestic abuse and where there were no children in the property the police had been called to.

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The Committee discussed the report and expressed their concern over the amount and quality of referrals from TVP and agreed that a further letter be sent to TVP to seek closer and improved working in respect of safeguarding children. The Committee also requested that future reports be submitted to the Committee as soon as possible after publication, that the Chair of the LSCB be encouraged to attend the meeting to present the report and that the report contain more detailed information in respect of Black and Minority Ethnic children.

Resolved -

- (1) That the report be noted;**
- (2) That in future the LSCB Annual Report be submitted to the Committee as soon as practical after its publication and the Chair of the LSCB be encouraged to attend the meeting in order to present the report;**
- (3) That the Director of Education, Adult and Children's Services write to Thames Valley Police to seek closer and improved working in respect of safeguarding children;**
- (4) That the LSCB be asked to include more detailed information in respect of Black and Minority Ethnic children in future Annual Reports.**

29. EDUCATION STANDARDS IN READING

Further to Minute 15 of the last meeting Kevin McDaniel, Head of Education, submitted a report focusing on the groups that had been achieving less well than the average in the Borough, along with identifying the underlying issues for Key Stage 2. Tables setting out equalities data were attached to the report at Appendix 1 and a graph showing the Ofsted inspection outcomes for all Reading schools as at December 2013 was attached to the report at Appendix 2.

The report considered equality and language progress which had demonstrated some areas of noticeable improvement, along with areas which had continued to fall behind the Reading averages. It also considered the progress of the Borough's schools as judged by Ofsted and identified potential contributing factors to the Key Stage 2 performance.

The report outlined the shared goals that all schools had set to see Reading achieving well on a national comparison basis by the summer of 2017. The goals had been developed with schools at a recent Landscape Leadership Conference that had been attended by leaders from the Borough's schools, they had represented a re-stated partnership ambition for all schools and the Council and some key performance measures had already been developed in order to enable measurement against the goals.

The report stated that this represented a determined and purposeful approach by the education community, including the Council, to ensure that children in Reading developed greater learning skills and achieved the very best of their potential. The

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Council would move resources and capacity to supporting the achievement of these measures and would specifically commit to additional funding, to be found within existing budgets, to support this.

The report stated that there were many complex issues at play across the Borough and recommended that a task and finish group be set up to carry out an in depth assessment of the issues with the aim of improving educational attainment in the Borough.

Resolved -

- (1) That the recommendations set out in the report to strengthen the Council's focus on: those pupils on the edge of education; leadership in writing; and further support for improved governance and for officers to submit a fully resourced plan to support this additional work to a future meeting;
- (2) That a task and finish group be established, with the membership as set out below, to consider in detail the work being undertaken to 'narrow the gap' and to determine how effectively these groups were being served, especially in the light of the overall level of performance in Reading, as set out in the report:

Councillors Ballsdon, D Edwards, Gavin, O'Connell and Williams;

- (3) That the shared goals created during the 2013/14 Landscape Leadership Conference, as set out below, be endorsed:

'We believe that in Reading, the education system will:

- Raise attainment through high quality leadership and focused collaboration;
- Delight and inspire children, all of whom are included and achieve well;
- Education practitioners take a shared responsibility for children's futures;
- Engage with families and each other to seek the provision for every child;
- Attract, train and retain outstanding teachers;
- Be attractive to families, parents and businesses.

30. UPDATE ON CHANGES TO SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS PROVISION 2014-16

Further to Minute 22 of the meeting of Policy Committee on 15 July 2013, Avril Wilson, Director of Education, Adult and Children's Services, submitted a report setting out the current position in relation to national changes to Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision which were due to commence in September 2014 and flow from the Children and Families Bill. A proposed draft poster to summarise the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) journey for use with young people, parents and carers, schools and partners, was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

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The report stated that the pace of change programme nationally had been slower than initially expected because of the complexity of the changes that had been proposed. The Department for Education (DfE) had indicated that the transition to Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans would be phased in from September 2014 over three years instead of an in-year transition at that point.

The DfE had also extended the resources that had been provided with a one-off, ring-fenced, allocation of £250k for the three years 2014-2017 to support the process of transition in the SEN system. This was in addition to the £75k that had been provided in 2013/14 for support. The Council had used the initial support to bring in some national expertise to work alongside officers on two aspects of the consultation. The first strand of work had been with schools, using financial information to assess the overall sustainability of the system and to recommend an approach which aligned with the draft SEN strategy principles. The second strand of work had been consultation work with parents and other stakeholders to ensure that the full range of voices had been heard. The consultation had been open to all via an online survey on the Council's website and the Family Information Service and Parent Partnership had been promoting it to all of those who used their services.

The report explained that the consultation had identified that the range of changes were confusing to people and that communication would need to be careful, comprehensive and regular. A generic poster had been produced which attempted to set out the timescale for changes along with the strategic approach which put the child and their family at the centre of the system.

The sustainability review had identified that the current system was considered opaque to schools and long-winded by parents. This had led to a feeling of inequality and the risk of inconsistency in terms of the level of resources applied to different children of comparable need.

The report explained that the Schools Forum had noted the pressures on the resources in the High Needs Area and had increased the budget share for 2014/15.

The Committee discussed the report and it was suggested that if the draft poster was to be used with young people, parents and carers, schools and partners it needed to be simplified so that it was clear and easily understood by its target audience. The Committee also agreed that if necessary an 'out of cycle' meeting be held to consider the action plan and communication plan before the next scheduled meeting in July 2014.

Resolved -

- (1) That changes in legislation at national level driving change within the Reading system be noted;
- (2) That the Director of Education, Adult and Children's Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Education, publish a detailed action plan once the information from the consultation exercise could be reported and synthesised;

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- (3) That the need to engage and inform parents, children and young people and schools be noted;
- (4) That the poster, attached to the report at Appendix 1, be simplified so that it was clear and easily understood by its target audience;
- (5) That the Director of Education, Adult and Children's Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Education, be given delegated authority to take any decision about how to allocate ring-fenced funding provided by the Department for Education to support the changes in the law;
- (6) That an Action Plan and Communication Plan be submitted to a future meeting at the first possible opportunity, possibly to an 'out of cycle' meeting, and all attempts are made to inform parents about when changes were likely to be implemented.

31. EARLY HELP STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

Further to Minute 22 of the last meeting, Karen Reeve, Head of Children's Services, submitted a report presenting the Early Help Strategy Action Plan. A copy of the Action Plan as at January 2014 was attached to the report.

The report explained that following publication of the Early Help Strategy work had begun to develop an Action Plan with the service managers responsible for areas covered by the Strategy. The Plan set out how the key actions that had been identified in the Strategy would be delivered. As an overarching Strategy the Action Plan covered the high-level actions only and would be updated regularly to reflect ongoing developments in Early Help services during the life of the Strategy; progress in delivering the actions would be monitored by senior managers. The LSCB would receive reports on progress to enable them to fulfil their role in scrutinising the effectiveness of Early Help Services.

The Committee discussed the report and it was suggested that extra columns should be added to the Action Plan for timescale and achievement against each objective.

Resolved -

- (1) That the Early Help Strategy Action Plan be endorsed;
- (2) That the Action Plan be amended to include columns for timescale and achievement against each objective.

32. ANNUAL REPORT ON CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL ACTIVITY

Averil Kathan, Service Manager - LAC, submitted a report providing an update relating to the activities of the Corporate Parenting Panel for 2013. A copy of a guide that had been commissioned by Local Government Improvement and Development and written by the Centre for Public Scrutiny entitled 'ten questions

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to ask if you're scrutinising services for looked after children' was tabled at the meeting.

The report explained that the Parenting Panel met four times during the Municipal Year and considered a number of items as standard; an update on the progress of the Reading LAC Children in Care Council/Implementation of the Pledge, a performance report in relation to services for LAC, reports from the two residential units, a report from the Virtual School headteacher and a report from the Health Lead on the provision of health services to LAC. The meetings also considered thematic issues and received any feedback from any inspections, including receiving the Annual Independent Reviewing Officers report.

The report detailed the activities of the Panel during 2013 under the following headings:

- Children in Care Council and Youth Work Development;
- Education;
- Health;
- Key Performance Indicators.

The Committee discussed the report and requested that a report be submitted to the next meeting detailing the authority's position in respect of the guide commissioned by Local Government Improvement and Development and written by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

Resolved -

- (1) That the work of the Parenting Panel be endorsed and Councillors encouraged to attend Parenting Panel meetings during 2014;
- (2) That the commitment to the principles of corporate parenting, as detailed in the report, be affirmed;
- (3) That a report be submitted to the next meeting detailing the authority's position in respect of the guide commissioned by Local Government Improvement and Development and written by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.52 pm).