

**ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES - 22 JULY 2024**

Present: Councillor Mpofu-Coles (Chair);
Councillors Lanzoni (Vice-Chair), Cresswell, Davies, Griffith, Keane, McEwan, McGoldrick, Naz, Nikulina, O'Connell, DP Singh and Woodward

Apologies: Councillors Ballsdon and Gittings

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The minutes of the following meeting were received:

- Health and Wellbeing Board - 15 March 2024

6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

Two questions on the following matters were asked in accordance with Standing Order 36.

Questions	Subject	Reply
Jamie Gordon	ADHD Data	Cllr McEwan
Pete Evans	SEND Places in Reading	Cllr McEwan

(The full text of the question and reply was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

7. CAVERSHAM INDEPENDENT LEARNING REVIEW REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

The Committee received a report on the Caversham Independent Learning Review and associated action plan. Attached at Appendix 1 was the Caversham Independent Learning Review Action Plan and at Appendix 2 the Reading Borough Council response to the Ofsted Big Listen.

The report explained that following the HM Coroner inquest into the death of Ruth Perry which had concluded on 7th of December 2023. The HM Coroner had published a Prevention of future deaths report on 19 December 2023, requesting Department for Education, Ofsted, and Reading Borough Council to respond to identified matters of concern. The Committee had received a report at the meeting on 20 March 2024

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confirming the work that had been undertaken with schools in response to the Coroner's findings through the Education Partnership Board. One of the actions that Reading Borough Council had taken in response to the Coroner's findings was to undertake a learning review. The report confirmed the completion of the Independent Learning Review and included the actions that had been taken as a result of the review.

The report also explained that one of the actions in the plan which had already been completed was for Reading Borough Council to submit a response to the national consultation undertaken by Ofsted on inspections and inspection practice, The Big Listen. The Reading Borough Council submission to Ofsted was appended to the report at Appendix 2.

Steve Crocker and Brian Pope were at present at the meeting for the item and addressed the Committee and answered questions on the Independent Review.

Chris Tomkins also addressed the Committee on the item.

Resolved -

- (1) That the report regarding the Caversham Independent Learning Review be noted.**
- (2) That the action plan and progress on actions be noted.**
- (3) That confirmation from the Executive Director, Children's Services that actions have been completed be received at a future Committee.**

8. OFSTED INSPECTION OF READING'S LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILACS)

The Committee received a report that provided information on the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). A copy of the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Report was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that Reading's children's services were last inspected, as Brighter Futures for Children, in September 2019 and upgraded from inadequate (in 2016) to 'requires improvement to be good'. In April 2024 the Council's Children's Services, delivered by Brighter Futures for Children, were inspected over three weeks, the first week being offsite and the second two weeks on site at the Civic Offices and other sites in Reading.

It was reported that the inspectors:

- Focused on social workers' direct practice with families by scrutinising and discussing a sample of children's records.
- Held discussions with practitioners working with children – this included social workers, family help workers, reviewing officers, managers and education staff.

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- Met with children, young people, care leavers, parents and carers including foster carers and adopters.
- Met with leaders and managers across the Council, Brighter Futures for Children and other partner agencies to understand how we work together to safeguard children.

The final report was published on 12 July 2024 with the following judgements:

Judgement	2024 Grade	2019 Grade
Overall effectiveness	Requires Improvement to be Good	Requires Improvement to be Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires Improvement to be Good	Requires Improvement to be Good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Good	Requires Improvement to be Good
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good	Not a separate grade in the 2019 inspection framework
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires Improvement to be Good	Requires Improvement to be Good

The report set out several strengths and areas for improvement. At the time of the inspection work was, and remained, underway to build on strengths and address areas of improvement through the delivery of Brighter Futures for Children’s Continuous Improvement Plan and Transformation Programme. The report noted that *‘the transformation plan addresses the right priorities and there is a clear vision for the delivery of services. Some progress is already evident and senior leaders have a good understanding of the improvements that have yet to be achieved.’*

An action plan in response to the recommendations was required to be submitted to Ofsted by 21 October 2024.

Resolved -

- (1) That the ILACS report be noted;
- (2) That the actions taken to date be noted;
- (3) That the Executive Director for Children’s Services be given delegated authority to submit the required action plan to Ofsted in consultation

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with the Lead Councillor for Children's Services and Chief Executive of the Council, be approved.

9. SCHOOL TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE POLICY 2025-2026

The Committee received a report providing details of Readings School Transport Policy 2024-2026, which was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Following reports that had been considered at the ACE Committee meeting in January 2024 relating to the published School Transport Policy, several proposed changes to the Policy were agreed to be consulted on as follows:

- That a consultation on School Transport policy changes to remove free transport entitlement for pupils attending Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School and to change current transport arrangements be undertaken.
- That consultation on School Transport policy clarification be undertaken, as follows:
 - Travel assistance entitlement means an offer of a bus pass or school bus at a pickup point, with an expectation for active travel as part of a child's healthy development;
 - Clarification of the exceptional circumstances and appropriate evidence required to access any exceptional additional support in addition to travel assistance;
 - That parents were liable for costs incurred by Brighter Futures for Children on behalf of Reading Borough Council if children did not access travel assistance provided;
 - That students were not entitled to travel assistance post-16 except in appropriately evidenced exceptional circumstances.

The formal consultation had taken place during February and had closed on 30 March 2024 and 120 individual responses had been received from parents and pupils. Engagement sessions were held with parents of pupils at Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge, Reading Families Forum and Special United (Reading's forum for young people with SEND). The results of the 2024 secondary admission round had also informed the impact assessment and provided the levels of interest in Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge school.

The report provided information on several issues that were identified from the consultation and explained that consideration had been given to students who did have the option to move to the River Academy from September 2024; those who might not wish to take up the option (particularly those with exams coming up); and parents who might have been unaware of the proposed changes at the point of selecting a school.

It was noted that there would not be a charge for transport for school refusers as this issue would be dealt with under a separate policy.

Resolved –

- (1) That the following School Transport policy clarifications be agreed:**

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- **Travel assistance entitlement meant an offer of a bus pass or school bus at a pickup point, with an expectation for active travel as part of a child's healthy development;**
 - **Clarification of the exceptional circumstances appropriate evidence required to access any exceptional additional support in addition to travel assistance;**
 - **That parents were liable for costs incurred by Brighter Futures for Children on behalf of Reading Borough Council if children did not access travel assistance provided;**
 - **That students were not entitled to travel assistance post-16 except in appropriately evidenced exceptional circumstances.**
- (2) **That School Transport policy changes to remove free transport entitlement for pupils attending Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School be agreed.**
- (3) **That transitional protections be in place for the next three academic years to support previously eligible pupils, including pupils starting at Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School in September 2024 be agreed.**
- (4) **That officers ensure that families who would continue to qualify for transport (due to distance to their nearest suitable school, and families who did not have a safe walking route to the school), were supported to apply for ongoing transport assistance in the coming academic year be agreed.**
- (5) **That officer engagement with the Department for Education and Oxfordshire County Council to request an update on school place plans for South Oxfordshire, and offers to assist in the planning process regarding South Oxfordshire schools, to further support Reading families be noted.**

10. BFFC CHILDREN IN CARE SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2024-2026

The Committee received a report providing details of the Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) Sufficiency Strategy for 2024-2026. The Strategy was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the BFfC Sufficiency Strategy set out how the Company intended to meet sufficiency duty on behalf of Reading Borough Council and was a statutory requirement set out in Section 22G of the Children's Act 1989. This duty required "local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looked after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area ('the Sufficiency Duty')".

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The purpose of the Strategy was to set out the vision and approach to providing sufficient, safe, secure and appropriate homes to meet the diverse needs of the children in care and care leavers over the next two years. The aim was for children and young people to have access to homes which were of the highest quality; child and family centred; personalised and responsive to support our children to achieve the best possible outcomes. The emphasis was on providing local homes in Reading or as close to Reading as possible so children and young people could remain in contact with family, friends, and local services.

Resolved –

- (1) That the report and the steps being taken by Brighter Futures for Children Ltd to improve the sufficiency of placements for children and young people be noted.**
- (2) That the strategy be published as per the sufficiency duty.**
- (3) That the strategy be reviewed in 12 months.**

11. AUTISM STRATEGY YEAR 2 ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Committee received a report providing an update on the progress of the Year 2 (2023/24) All Age Autism Action Plan. The following documents were appended to the report:

- Appendix 1 - All Age Autism Strategy for Reading 2022 to 2026
- Appendix 2 - Autism Action Plan – Year 2 2023/24
- Appendix 3 - Reading All Age Autism Strategy Priorities
- Appendix 4 - The Equality Impact Assessment

The report explained that the Reading All Age Autism Strategy and its associated Action Plan had been developed and delivered by the Reading Partnership Board. The Board reported directly into the Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure the strategy remained a priority and owned by all partner agencies. It was noted that the Partnership Board had presentation from the following agencies:

- RBC Adult Social Care (Chair)
- Reading Families Forum
- BOB Integrated Care Board
- Brighter Futures for Children (Operational and Commissioning representatives)
- Adults Commissioning & Contracts
- Autism Berkshire
- Royal Berkshire Hospital
- Thames Valley Police

The report provided information on progress Partner agencies had made in delivering Year 2 of the All Age Autism Strategy. Some of the key developments included autism training,

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early years support, transitions to adulthood, employment support, healthcare support, support living accommodation, criminal justice support, and carers and family support.

The areas of work outstanding were planned to be undertaken in the next two years; these were outlined in Appendix 3 as attached to the report.

Resolved – That the progress of the Year 2 (2023/24) All Age Autism Strategy Action Plan be noted.

12. PARKSIDE HOUSE BLOCK CONTRACT

The Committee received a report seeking to obtain delegated authority for the Executive Director for Communities & Adult Social Care to make annual decisions about the running of, and changes to, the Parkside House block contract, without the need to submit variation reports through to Committee.

The report explained that the Parkside House block contract was a 24-year contract with a lifetime value of £28,731,500. Recent changes to the Council's Contract Procedure Rules required the total value of a contract to be considered when any variation was made to the contract, and approval of any variation needed to be authorised in accordance with the Tender Acceptance levels set out in the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. The value of this particular contract was such that a Committee decision would be required for any variation due to the high contract value. A formal decision of Committee, or an Executive Director with an authority delegated specifically by a formal decision of Committee were the only officers or bodies able to authorise a variation for a contract like this one, with a value in excess of £500,001 per annum.

It was noted that as the Council generally requested annual variations of the Provider, to ensure that the service met the changing needs of Reading residents, delegated authority for the Executive Director to make these decisions was being sought.

Resolved - That the Executive Director of Communities & Adult Social Care Services be granted delegated authority to make variations to the Parkside House nursing block contract, where the variations had a value less than the Council's criteria for a key decision but where income or expenditure exceeded £500,001 per annum.

(The meeting closed at 7.56 pm)