

# ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 15 JANUARY 2025

**Present:** Councillor Mpofu-Coles (Chair);

Councillors Lanzoni (Vice-Chair), Ballsdon, Cresswell, Davies, Gittings, Griffith, Keane, McEwan, Naz, O'Connell, DP Singh and Woodward

**In attendance:** Councillors McGoldrick and Nikulina

## 26. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## 27. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

One question on the following matter was submitted by Councillor Cresswell.

Question	Subject	Reply
Councillor Cresswell	Oral Health Strategy	Councillor McEwan

## 28. MENTAL HEALTH CHAMPIONS - ME2 CLUB

The Committee were joined by young people and representatives from the Me2 Club [Me2Club – Me2 Club](#) to provide information on the work of the club and how young people had been supported.

The members of the Me2 Club addressed the Committee and provided examples of their difficult experiences at school and outside of school. They explained how the club had helped them build confidence and supported them with their education and well-being. The young people explained that they helped the club with fundraising and the club provided social activities which helped young people come together and realise they were not alone in their experiences.

The Committee asked a number of questions and thanked the representatives from the Me2 Club for attending the meeting.

## 29. SUSPENSIONS AND EXCLUSIONS UPDATE

The Committee received an update on the current position regarding school exclusions and suspensions from school. The Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC) Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) performance and data report was available at Appendix 1, and the Suspensions analysis – Key Lines of Enquiry was available at Appendix 2 to the report.

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The report explained that following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was national concern and national priority to re-engage children and young people in education and to ensure that all young people, including those most vulnerable, were securing positive destinations into adulthood through employment, education and training. The Committee were informed of two areas of priority performance improvements and consideration of further actions to support children and young people in Reading to thrive and succeed.

The Committee noted the key headlines from the analysis outlined in Appendix 1 which included:

- Persistent Disruptive Behaviour and Physical Abuse/Threat to Adult was the primary reason for SEND suspension. This could also be described or understood as distressed behaviour from children with SEND, and often with experience of trauma too (Reading had seen a greater rise of children looked after (CLA) with SEND than the national or South East picture, from 50.3% to 63.4%), who were struggling to cope in school and becoming significantly dysregulated.
- The majority of children (63%) were not receiving support before suspension.
- 18% of children in Reading had experienced 50% of the suspensions, enabling targeting of system support to schools on these children.
- The analysis showed how many children were known to Children's Social Care and to Youth Justice, which enabled the start to initiate pan-BFfC thinking and response and coordinate preventative activity.
- 20% of these children were eligible for Free School Meals and living in a wider context of poverty. Overall suspensions of students that were identified as being in receipt of Free School Meals had reduced by 14% at this point this academic year, when compared with 23/24.
- There was a potential disproportionate suspension of children with particular ethnic and cultural heritages, in line with the national picture, which required specific local action.

The report explained that suspension rates were a key area of concern in the local education system. Whilst permanent exclusions performance had improved over the previous four years and remained relatively stable, suspension rates had increased. Suspensions in some schools were concerning and impacted outcomes. As suspensions were actions taken by the Headteacher of the school, improvement required a partnership response with all school leaders. The Education Partnership Board has reducing suspensions as a key priority this academic year.

The report outlined that suspension rates had increased rapidly over the past three years throughout England. However, suspensions had increased by a slower rate in Reading. The permanent exclusion rate in England had grown just as rapidly over the past three years and the permanent exclusion rate in Reading had grown even faster albeit starting from a lower base. The availability, affordability, and quality of alternative provision had been identified by school leaders as a contributing factor, alongside the need to recruit and retain staff and secure community confidence in behaviour and safety.

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The Committee noted that systems to support risk assessment and risk prevention for children at risk of Suspension or not in receipt of full-time education (including bought back behaviour support offer) were being enhanced, with the Education Partnership Board being asked to endorse and promote a one-Reading approach to suspension reduction across all Reading schools, regardless of whether they were an academy or a Local Authority maintained school.

It was reported BFFC had been working closely with the Department for Education regarding the transfer of John Madejski Academy into Greenshaw Learning Trust, a new multi-academy trust. The Chief Executive of the trust would be invited to attend the next ACE meeting to discuss their work with BFFC, approach and ethos.

Following questions and discussion it was reported that schools were engaging in safeguarding and undertaking a multidisciplinary approach to focus on children that were not in school.

Following a discussion it was noted that a report on non-attendance had been requested at the last meeting and it was requested that this be provided at the next meeting. Also it was suggested that a Task and Finish Group be set up to help inform and support an action plan to tackle suspensions and exclusions in the area.

### **Resolved –**

- (1) That the improved position regarding school exclusions and suspensions from schools be noted;**
- (2) That further actions being taken regarding suspensions from schools be noted;**
- (3) That the Chief Executives of priority Trusts be invited to attend the next meeting to share their plans to promote school inclusion and to reduce suspensions from schools be agreed;**
- (4) That a Task and Finish Group be set up to help inform/support an action plan to address suspensions and exclusions.**

### **30. SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES**

The Committee received a report providing information on school place planning for children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The report explained that the School Place Planning Strategy 2022-2027 that had been considered by the Committee in March 2024 (Minute 36 refers), set out how Brighter Futures for Children on behalf of Reading Borough Council delivered sufficient school places in the context of the Council's statutory duties, ensuring that school place delivery supported the achievement of the best outcomes for children in Reading.

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The Strategy confirmed that there were more than sufficient primary school places, and with the delivery of the new secondary academy, River Academy from September 2024, sufficient secondary places, for the duration of the Strategy. The Strategy had been updated with the latest capacity and census data and was appended to the report.

The Strategy identified two key challenges for Reading:

- Addressing the budget and surplus place challenges in community primary schools. An increasing number of primary schools were facing challenges in balancing their budgets, and with no projected increase in primary age pupils, the spare capacity in the system created further potential budget risks for schools; and
- Meeting the rising challenge of sufficiency of specialist provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision and the pressures on the Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block. The strategy set out in some detail the needs analysis and population projections which confirmed the need for a 180 place all through (primary and secondary) special school to meet current lack of sufficiency in special school provision in Reading.

The report explained that following a detailed options appraisal, which had included considerations of whether school closures were required, a preferred option of expansion and split site relocation of Holy Brook school to the site of Whitley Park School and Ridgeway Primary School was recommended, in order to:

- i) address the immediate risks and pressures associated with the insufficiency of Special Educational school places in Reading, whilst also;
- ii) minimising disruption to school staff and pupils; and
- iii) improving the range and number of school places available in suitable provision for Reading's children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).

There would be extensive informal pre-statutory consultation and formal statutory consultation taken for any significant change to school organisation. Dedicated engagement sessions would be held with, the parents of current pupils impacted by any proposed change, Reading Families Forum and Special United, Reading's forum for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability.

Officers thanked the ACE Task and Finish Group for their input on the options being considered for the development of a new special school.

### **Resolved –**

- (1) **That the options appraisal process undertaken and the proposal to develop split site special school provision as the preferred option for a new 180 – place special school provision as presented to the ACE Committee Task and Finish Group be noted.**

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(2) **That public consultation on two proposals set out in the associated report as the first stages of the plan to develop split site special school provision be agreed:**

- a. **To consult on the Federation of Holybrook Primary School and Whitley Park Primary School**
- b. **To consult on the location of Holybrook Primary School, to expand from the current site to also include areas of Whitley Park School site and Ridgeway Primary school site.**

## 31. INEQUALITIES IN MATERNITY SERVICES

The Committee received a presentation from Christine Harding, Director of Midwifery, Royal Berkshire Hospital, on work being undertaken to address inequalities in maternity care.

The Committee were provided with the following information:

- The Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust was the main provider of maternity services for the population of Reading, Newbury, Wokingham and the towns and villages of west Berkshire.
- 5800 bookings per year for maternity care and 4600 births.
- On a typical day 13 babies were born across three different settings.
- There was more awareness around birth inequalities following publication of confidential inquiries for families from the global majority and high deprivation.
- A clinical dashboard was being redeveloped to collect data to help understand the population and outcomes relating to certain recognised protected characteristics and to support service improvement.
- Engagement work was being undertaken with groups such as Enthusiastic Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership.
- Maternity services were promoted during Black History Month and to help build relationships.
- Community Engagement leads had been appointed.
- A new provider for translation services had been piloted to give instant access to a face to face interpreter via video call on an I-pad which could be wheeled into any clinical environment.
- Access to services were being improved for appointments and working with black women to help improve health outcomes.
- A Neuro Diverse Pathway was being developed to support patients with the development of an education tool kit 'grab bag' for midwives to give 1 to 1 sessions. The project would be developed across Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.
- A Continuity of Care Team provided antenatal, labour and postnatal care for women in areas of high deprivation. Evidence had shown this had an impact on the reduction of perinatal mortality.
- A series of pregnancy after loss care pathways had been introduced to ensure that women received the best possible care in pregnancies after a loss.

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The Committee discussed the report and presentation and thanked Christine for the information.

The Chair requested that a more detailed report be provided to the Committee in 12 months with specific data regarding the Global Majority women (BAME) and further information regarding the translation services.

**Resolved – That a further report be submitted to the Committee in 12 months to include data specific to the Reading area.**

## 32. SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2026 - 2027

The Committee received a report to determine the school admission arrangements for 2026/2027 as follows:

- The admissions arrangements for Community Primary Schools in Reading for the school year 2026/27.
- The coordinated scheme for primary and junior schools for the 2026/27 school year.
- The coordinated scheme for secondary schools for the 2026/27 school year.
- The Relevant Area for 2026.
- Maps of the Primary catchment areas

Copies of the schemes, policies and relevant area were appended to the report at Annexes A, B C, D and E.

**Resolved – That the School Admissions Arrangements 2026-2027 be agreed.**

## 33. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT

The Committee received a report providing an overview of complaints, compliments, Subject Access Requests (SARs) activity and performance for Children's Social Care Social Care for the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. Nayana George, Information Rights Services Manager, provided an overview to the Committee.

The report stated that over the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 the service had received 75 statutory complaints, which was a decrease of 2 (2.6%) against the 77 received in 2022/23. To give context, in 2023/24, 3,003 children in total were referred into children's social care, so the number of statutory complaints represents 2.5%. These referrals were regarding a mix of both new and existing children and young people. This compared to 2,843 referrals and 2.7% for 2022/23. Of the 75 complaints received 17 (13.0%) were resolved through alternative dispute resolution (ADR) by the social care teams. The remaining 58 (87.0%) had progressed to a formal investigation, although one of these was subsequently withdrawn by the complainant once the investigation had commenced and 57 were investigated to outcome. The top complaint themes were quality of service provided or received, staff conduct and communication.

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During the reporting period, 10 complaints progressed to a Stage 2 investigation. Some of these related to Stage 1 complaints received in this reporting year, and some to Stage 1 complaints that had been received in the previous reporting year (2022/23). There were also four cases that were reviewed by a Stage 3 review panel.

It was noted that both the Customer Relations Team, on Brighter Futures for Children's (BFfC) behalf, and BFfC's Communications & Compliance and HR/Training teams had continued to raise awareness of the complaints process with both staff and the public.

Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO) had received eight representations from dissatisfied service users for issues relating to BFfC. This was a decrease of 15 from the previous year. Of the eight cases, the LGSCO assessed all eight and investigated two. One was upheld the other was awaiting a final outcome. In respect of the one case upheld, the LGSCO asked the Council/BFfC to apologise, provide financial redress and improve the information about advocacy providers on the website. Of the remaining six cases, two were deemed premature and investigated by BFfC, the remaining four were all assessed but not investigated as they were either, not within the LGSCO's jurisdiction to investigate or closed after initial enquiry/assessment. There were no formal public reports issued in 2023/24.

During the same period a total of 50 compliments had been received.

The Customer Relations Team had processed all SARs requests for BFfC. These were open and closed children's social care cases (historical cases where paper and microfiche files were held at the records centre) and Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) cases.

In 2023/24, the Customer Relations Team had received 75 requests for records, 16 more than the 59 requests received in 2022/23 relating to BFfC. Of the 75 requests received 71 requests were completed. The remaining four cases were waiting to be processed as at the end of March 2024, this number would have altered by the time the report was presented at ACE.

The main reasons for the backlog were restrictions posed by the pandemic, move of paper records from Dawin Close to Bennet Road with restricted access and lack of resources to redact files. In all cases the Customer Relations Team and the Information Governance Team had kept in regular contact with requestors to ensure they were kept up to date on the progress of their requests. Extra BFfC resource had been deployed to help the Customer Relations Team clear backlogs, and the Council had purchased new software for the redaction work.

### **Resolved –**

- (1) That the contents of the report and intended actions to further improve service delivery and the management of representations, particularly complaints, in children's services in Reading be noted;**

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- (2) **That the continuing work to raise awareness of all conflict resolution processes, including the statutory complaints process and encourage appropriate use by children, young people and their families be noted.**

### 34. ADULT SOCIAL CARE ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT

The Committee received a report providing an overview of complaints and compliments activity and performance for Adult Social Care for the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. A summary of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2023/24 was attached to the report at Appendix A. Nayana George, Information Rights Services Manager, provided an overview to the Committee.

The report stated that over the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 the service had received seven corporate complaints, which was a 30% significant decrease compared to the 10 that had been received in 2022/23, and 50 statutory complaints, which was a 55.1% decrease compared to the 89 that had been received in 2022/23. There were no requests for a corporate Stage 2 investigation during this period.

The main themes for the period 2023/24 for both corporate and statutory complaints were:

- Quality of Service Provided
- Staff Conduct
- Financial

Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman had received two representations from dissatisfied service users for issues relating to Adult Care & Health Services, which was three less than the previous year. Of these two cases, one was about the Council's financial assessment and the customer's assessed contribution which the LGSCO had investigated, the outcome was no fault found, the remaining one was about adult social care provided at home which was deemed premature and investigated at the LGSCO's request by the Council. The Council shared the findings with the LGSCO who closed the case without further investigation.

In the year 2023/24 12 compliments were received in comparison to the previous year when six were recorded.

#### **Resolved –**

- (1) **That the contents of the report be noted;**
- (2) **That the action taken in response to learning from complaints, as described in the summary at Appendix A to the report, be noted.**

### 35. NURSING DEMENTIA BLOCK BED CONTRACT

The Committee received a report to consider Nursing Dementia Block Bed Contracts to secure future provision for Reading residents.

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The report explained that ACE Committee on 22 October 2020 (Minute 2 refers) had authorised Adult Social Care commissioning to offer and manage new block contracts of up to 15 beds each to total 30 beds (for 01/10/2021), each contract would be for the term of two years with the option to extend for up to a further four years. One of the nursing dementia block contracts (of 15 beds) was terminated by the provider in September 2023, more than halving the Council's secured provision. A Needs Analysis had been completed in 2024 to determine the provision, needs and options within the Borough and determined the need to replace the terminated contract with four contracts of five beds each totalling 20 block beds over a 10-year contract.

It was reported that the South of England was currently experiencing capacity issues in the market for nursing dementia beds resulting in hospital discharge delays and causing an increase in the fees paid for such placements. Reading Council therefore must ensure that provision was available to meet the Council's needs. The report outlined the need and demand in Reading for service users requiring nursing dementia care.

Commissioning officers were preparing a tender for the Council to secure future provision for Reading residents and reduce the overall cost of placements for the Council. The report outlined options considered and recommended that the Council commission four block bed contracts of five beds under a capped tender price of £1,009 per bed per week. The contracts would run for five years with an option to extend for a further five years with the full lifetime of the contract at a maximum price of £10,061,613 and cost avoidance of £2,074,148.

### **Resolved –**

- (1) That the Executive Director of Communities and Adult Social Care be given delegated authority, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care, to:**
  - Award the contracts to the successful provider(s) of four block bed contracts of five beds to run for five years with an option to extend for a further five years. The lifetime of the contract budget had been agreed at a maximum price of £10,061,613;**
  - Negotiate, vary, extend and manage the contract(s) at the appropriate times throughout the lifecycle within the lifetime financial envelope stated and in accordance with the relevant Procurement Regulations and the contracts.**

### **36. YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE INSPECTION**

The Committee received a report on the Youth Justice Service inspection undertaken by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) between 9 and 13 September 2024. The inspection had focused on four domains; 1 - Governance and Leadership, 2 - Post Court Work, 3 - Pre-Court Work and 4 - Resettlement.

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The report explained that HMIP had published their inspection report on 3 December 2024. Overall, the service was rated as Inadequate, with four sub ratings provided for domains 1 – 3. Domain 4 was not rated as there were no resettlement cases to inspect.

The report made the following eight recommendations:

- The Reading Youth Justice Service manager should:
  - ensure that quality assurance arrangements, oversight of practice, and supervision arrangements consistently supported staff and volunteer development.
  - ensure that assessing activity always considered how best to achieve safety for the child and the community.
  - ensure that planning activity was comprehensive and that it aligned effectively with activity undertaken by other services, including the consideration of appropriate contingency arrangements.
  - ensure that staff consistently liaised with all relevant services when delivering interventions.
  - ensure that commensurate focus was given to the needs of victims.
- The Reading Youth Justice Management Board should:
  - ensure that the YJS was both sufficiently resourced and structured to facilitate the delivery of high-quality interventions for children and the victims of crime
  - assure itself that the disproportionality action plan was being used effectively across the partnership to enhance equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB)
  - work together to ensure that children had access to, and could engage with, high-quality, aspirational education, training and employment opportunities.

The report explained that a detailed and robust improvement plan had been created and endorsed by the Reading Youth Justice Management Board and submitted to HMIP by 20 December 2024. The plan set out in detail how the service and partnership would meet the recommendations and address the findings. Following the inspection, the service had undertaken a full review of all open cases to provide assurance that case work met a minimum level of safety for both children and victims.

The Committee discussed the report and it was noted that all staff posts had been filled and offered. The HMIP had not given an indication of when the next inspection would take place however, the service would be given time to improve before the next inspection.

The officers were thanked for their hard work and report. The Committee requested that an update on the improvement plan be provided in six months.

**Resolved – That the contents of the Youth Justice Service HMIP inspection report be noted and the Youth Justice Service Improvement Plan be endorsed.**

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(The meeting closed at 9.35 pm)