

ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 2 JULY 2025

Present: Councillor Asare (Chair);

Councillors Ballsdon, Cresswell, Eden, Gittings, Griffith, Keane,
Lanzoni, Naz, Mpofu-Coles, O'Connell, DP Singh and Woodward

1. DELEGATED DECISIONS

The delegated decision agreed at the ACE Committee meeting on 15 January 2025 was noted. It was also noted that there were no delegated decisions taken at the meeting on 19 March 2025.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. INTRODUCTION TO GREENSHAW LEARNING TRUST

Will Smith, Chief Executive Officer of the Greenshaw Learning Trust attended the meeting to provide information to the Committee on the Trust, the work being undertaken at John Madejski Academy and to answer questions from members of the Committee. The main points noted were:

- The Greenshaw Learning Trust (GLT) was a 10-year-old multi-academy trust with 37 schools across the South of England, including Reading.
- GLT valued strong relationships with local authorities and noted the support and collaboration being undertaken with officers at the Council.
- The Trust's ethos was encapsulated in its motto "Always Learning," reflecting a commitment to continuous improvement across all levels.
- GLT supported a wide range of schools (urban, rural, coastal) and used its diverse network to share best practices and solutions.
- John Madejski Academy (JMA) joined GLT under challenging circumstances; the Trust had a strong track record of turning around underperforming schools.
- Early improvements at JMA included a calmer, more orderly environment, improved student behaviour, and a focus on student happiness and academic success.
- GLT emphasised high expectations, a broad curriculum, and strong pastoral care, with a commitment to character development and academic outcomes.
- All GLT schools inspected by Ofsted had been rated Good or Outstanding.
- The Trust was committed to reducing suspensions and exclusions through consistent behaviour policies and supportive interventions.
- Uniform and equipment expectations were enforced with support: students were not excluded for non-compliance alone, and uniform was provided free where needed.

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- A name change from John Madejski Academy to Hartland High School would take effect from 1 September 2025; the change followed community consultation and was intended to support school improvement.
- Sir John Madejski had visited the school and expressed support for the changes, including plans to honour his legacy within the school.
- GLT was committed to supporting vulnerable children and those with special educational needs (SEND), employing a range of therapists and specialists.
- The Trust was trauma-informed and worked to identify and address underlying causes of behavioural issues, including through partnerships with social services.
- GLT welcomed visits from councillors and community members and was committed to ongoing engagement and transparency.
- The new substantive Headteacher, Emily Davies, would take up post in September 2025, bringing strong leadership to the next phase of the school's improvement journey.

The Chair thanked Will Smith for attending the meeting and welcomed an update to be provided to a future Committee meeting.

4. ANNUAL SCHOOL STANDARDS AND ACHIEVEMENT REPORT 2023/2024

The Committee received a report presenting the Annual School Standards and Achievement Report for the academic year 2023/2024. The report outlined the performance of schools in Reading, highlighted key trends in attainment and attendance, and set out strategic priorities for continued improvement.

The Lead Member for Education & Public Health, and the Director of Education introduced the report, noting that it was based on verified data from the 2023/24 academic year. The positive impact of early years and primary phase interventions were highlighted particularly in phonics and reading outcomes, and noted improvements in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. However, there were ongoing challenges, including variability in secondary outcomes, persistent absenteeism, and disparities affecting children of Black Caribbean Heritage.

The Committee was informed that the Education Partnership Board had identified strategic priorities to address these issues, including enhanced community engagement, targeted support for vulnerable groups, and a strengthened focus on 14–19 education pathways. The report also included, for the first time, a detailed analysis of attendance and its impact on attainment.

Simon Uttley, Headteacher of Blessed Hugh Faringdon Catholic School, and Co-Chair of the Reading Education Partnership Board was present at the meeting, addressed the Committee and answered questions. The main points noted were:

- The Education Partnership Board was not common across all authorities, making it a unique and valuable entity.
- The board's role was to unite school leaders, governors, officers, and other stakeholders around a shared vision.

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- The new substantive head of the John Madejski Academy, who would begin in September and had already engaged with the community at the secondary heads residential conference.
- There had been a positive reception of the new head's involvement and commitment to the shared vision in Reading.
- The current work of the partnership was exciting and innovative.
- There was active engagement being undertaken with the university sector and employers.
- Medium-term strategic planning would also soon be undertaken with the Board and officers.

Members asked a number of questions and the following points were noted:

- The Children Missing Education report was included in the materials for the upcoming Suspensions and Exclusions Task and Finish Group.
- EHCP students undergo formal assessment, while SEN Support students were supported directly by schools.
- A recent anti-racism education conference was held in partnership with Reading University, focusing on inclusive curricula and pedagogy.
- Schools were working on anti-racist practices, with some staff engaged in doctoral-level research.
- A School Effectiveness Framework would be implemented from September to support inclusive practices.
- A community action plan was being developed, with events planned before the end of the summer term. Councillors would be invited to participate in these initiatives and visit schools to observe best practices.
- Year 1 phonics results showed 80.7% of students achieved expected standards, surpassing the national average.
- The School Effectiveness Team had played a key role in supporting and challenging schools to improve outcomes.
- Strategic direction over the past 2–3 years was beginning to yield positive results, especially in early years and primary education.
- Teachers in primary settings were dedicated to raising standards and improving student outcomes.
- The standards team was recognised for its credibility, professionalism, and impact on school performance.
- Persistent attainment gaps for Black and Caribbean heritage children were highlighted as a key concern.
- Emphasis on trauma-informed approaches and decolonising education to improve learning outcomes.
- Teachers and schools were voluntarily contributing efforts to address equity and inclusion challenges.
- Focus needed to extend beyond primary education to include FE colleges, apprenticeships, and work readiness.
- Challenges remained for students aged 14–19, particularly those with SEND needs.
- A recommendation was proposed to explore partnerships to better support 14–19-year-olds.

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Members welcomed the report and commended the work of Brighter Futures for Children and school leaders. They discussed the importance of addressing cohort complexity, supporting schools with high proportions of vulnerable pupils, and ensuring that all children have access to high-quality, inclusive education.

The Committee noted the removal of the School Improvement and Monitoring Brokerage Grant and the continued funding of improvement work through the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Resolved –

- (1) That the position regarding school standards and attainment be noted;**
- (2) That the priorities and current and planned activity to further improve attainment, with a focus on reducing inequalities, as set out in Section 16 of the associated report, be endorsed;**
- (3) That the Committee receive a future update from the Task and Finish Group on attendance and suspensions.**
- (4) That partnerships working be explored to better support 14–19-year-olds.**

5. RESPONSE TO THE JOINT TARGETED AREA INSPECTION OF THE MULTI-AGENCY RESPONSE TO CHILDREN WHO ARE VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE IN READING

The Committee received a report that summarised the findings of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) conducted in Reading from 24 February to 14 March 2025. The inspection, carried out by Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP), focused on the multi-agency response to unborn children and children aged 0 to 7 years who are victims of domestic abuse.

The Lead Member for Children and the Director of Children's Services introduced the report, highlighting the inspection's findings, which included both strengths and areas for improvement. Strengths identified included the valued multidisciplinary response provided by family help and children's centres, the effectiveness of the pre-birth panel, and the support from specialist domestic abuse health professionals. However, the inspection also identified a Priority Action due to inconsistent information-sharing and weak decision-making that placed children at risk.

The Committee was informed that both single and multi-agency action plans were implemented at pace to address the identified weaknesses. These plans included improvements in strategy meeting timeliness, safety planning, information-sharing, and the use of data to understand the prevalence and impact of domestic abuse on children.

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Governance structures have been established to oversee progress, and a Partnership Action Plan would be submitted to Ofsted by 13 August 2025.

Chief Superintendent Felicity Parker, LCU Commander for Berkshire West attended the meeting to provide information on the work undertaken by Thames Valley Police (TVP) in relation to multi-agency safeguarding, particularly within the Berkshire West area. A number of questions were asked and the following key points were noted:

- A multi-agency safeguarding plan with additional single agency plans in place for Berkshire West and the wider Thames Valley area had been submitted.
- TVP would focus on improving data sharing with schools through Operation Encompass. Emphasis would ensure frontline officers completed submissions to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) with accurate and timely information. Efforts were being made to improve the timeliness and quality of information shared with schools and other partners.
- TVP were working to ensure that Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs) and Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) information were shared promptly with relevant partners. Strategic improvements were being explored to enhance data sharing responsibilities across agencies. Information was shared with the Berkshire West Children's Board and Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs), although further work was needed to strengthen this area.
- One of the key findings from the JTAI related to the timeliness of strategy meetings. TVP had addressed internal delays, such as waiting for officers on shift, and prioritised MASH work to improve responsiveness.
- There was a recognised need to better capture the voice of the child in Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs).
- TVP had the ability to surge resources into MASH through Operation Yearn, drawing officers from other departments to meet demand. This has recently been implemented to ensure timely responses.
- While operational collaboration with children's services was improving, further work was required at the strategic partnership level, particularly in relation to the Children's Board and CSPs.

Members noted the report and acknowledged the swift and comprehensive response by the partnership. They emphasised the importance of continued focus on safeguarding, reducing caseloads, and ensuring that children's voices were heard and acted upon. The Committee also noted the transition of Children's Services back into the Council and the anticipated monitoring visits by Ofsted.

Discussions were being undertaken with the Department for Education (DfE) to finalised the improvement notices and the appointment of the DfE improvement partner which would support scrutiny and assurance to the improvement work being undertaken.

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and noted that there would be an expectation that colleagues from the Integrated Care Board, Probation Service and Thames Valley Police would attend the next update of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection.

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Resolved –

- (1) That the findings of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection and the areas for improvement be noted;**
- (2) That the delivery of the single and multi-agency action plans to address the findings of the inspection be noted (Appendices 1 & 2 of the report);**
- (3) That the governance arrangements be noted (Appendices 3 & 4 of the report);**
- (4) That a future update on the progress of the Partnership Action Plan and the impact of improvement activities be provided to the next meeting;**
- (5) That officers from the Integrated Care Board, Probation Service and Thames Valley Police attend the future update to provide information on their areas of improvement.**

6. SEND STRATEGY 2022-2027 ANNUAL UPDATE

The Committee received a report providing an update on the delivery of the Reading partnership Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2022–2027 and the Reading Local Area SEND Self Evaluation Framework (SEF). The report summarised progress made on the ambitions and actions set out in the strategy and highlighted the effectiveness of the partnership in improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their families.

The SEND Strategy 2022–2027, launched in January 2022, was delivered through six work strands: Communications, Early Intervention through to Specialist Support, Emotional Wellbeing, Preparing for Adulthood, Short Breaks, and Local Area Inspection. Each strand was overseen by a steering group with representation from Reading Borough Council, Brighter Futures for Children, the NHS, and parents and carers.

In October 2024, a strengthened SEND Strategy Board was launched, co-chaired by the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Director of Vulnerable People at the BOB Integrated Care Board. A comprehensive self-evaluation (SEF) was completed, highlighting strengths such as the commitment to co-production, the effectiveness of the Therapeutic Thinking approach, and the expansion of specialist provision.

Key Highlights included:

- Launch of the Reading Inclusion Support in Education (RISE) service to support inclusive practice in schools.
- Improved access to early years speech and language support, with no current waiting list.
- Development of a new Emotional Health Triage model to streamline access to mental health support.

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- Strategic leadership of a Berkshire-wide neurodivergent screening transformation project.
- Expansion of supported internships and employment pathways for young people with SEND.
- Continued co-production with families and young people, including the development of a SEND Roadmap and updated Local Offer resources.

Areas for Development included:

- Continued long waiting times for ADHD and autism assessments.
- Need for improved integration and clarity in health service pathways.
- Development of a joint commissioning strategy across BFfC, RBC, and the ICB.
- Expansion of post-16 education and housing options for young people with complex needs.
- Improved data sharing and tracking of short breaks and outcomes.

The Committee noted the progress made in early years and school inclusion, and discussed the importance of addressing waiting times, transitions to adulthood, and the need for integrated commissioning.

Resolved –

- (1) That the progress made in delivering the SEND Strategy 2022–2027 be noted;**
- (2) That the key strengths, challenges and priorities set out in the partnership Self Evaluation Framework (SEF) be noted;**
- (3) That the next steps to continue to deliver the 2022-2027 SEND Strategy be endorsed.**

7. AUTISM STRATEGY: YEAR 3 ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Committee received an update on the progress made in Year 3 of the All Age Autism Strategy Action Plan across Reading. The report highlighted achievements across all seven strategic priorities and outlined the contributions of partner agencies through the Autism Partnership Board.

The Committee were informed that the Action Plan, although unfunded, had been delivered within existing resources. Progress was noted across all workstreams, including autism training, early years and education support, transitions to adulthood, employment and vocational support, healthcare, supported living, criminal justice, and family and carer support.

The report outlined the importance of inclusive education, early intervention, and the need for continued focus on transitions and post-16 support. Also noted were the challenges

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posed by budget constraints and the importance of co-production with autistic people and their families.

Members discussed the report and noted that 63% of Reading schools had received training from Award in Education and Training (AET). The Committee were informed that the aim was for all schools to receive the training but due to timetabling this had not yet been completed. It was suggested that training could be delivered in partnership with Reading University for student teachers, and this would be investigated.

Resolved - That the progress made in Year 3 (2024/2025) of the All Age Autism Strategy Action Plan be noted.

8. SUPPORTED LIVING FRAMEWORK TENDER

The Committee received a report seeking approval to commence procurement of a new Supported Living Framework to replace the current contract which expires on 31 March 2026. The report outlined the rationale for the new framework, including the need to improve quality, reduce reliance on off-framework spot purchases, and ensure the service meets the increasing complexity of needs within the borough.

The report explained that there were a total of 367 commissioned supported living packages currently in place. 83% (306 packages, 77% of annual spend) of these were under the current framework contract which consisted of 18 providers, 17 of which were active. The remaining 17% (61 packages, 23% of annual spend) were spot purchased between 28 off framework providers and were required for various reasons, for example due to the current framework providers often not being able to meet complex needs.

The new framework would be structured into three Lots to better reflect the diversity of support needs:

- Lot 1 – Supported Living (accommodation-based)
- Lot 2 – Community Support (non-accommodation-based)
- Lot 3 – Complex Needs (specialist provision)

The proposed contract would run for an initial five-year term, with the option to extend for a further five years, with an estimated total value of £150m over the full term. The framework would include standardised pricing for Lots 1 and 2, with a bespoke pricing model under development for Lot 3.

The Committee noted that the new framework would introduce:

- Minimum accommodation standards aligned with national expectations.
- A tiering system based on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to incentivise quality.
- A strategic three-year workstream to embed cultural change and promote independence.

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- Enhanced oversight of complex needs provision and a focus on reducing residential placements.

The Committee also noted that engagement work would be undertaken with individuals with lived experience and the establishment of a “Working Together Supported Living Group” to co-produce elements of the specification.

In response to questions it was noted that there was expected capacity for services to meet the demands and work would be undertaken so that the right quality, training and support was provided. There was an expectation that care packages would be reviewed to a 12 month strategy.

Resolved –

- (1) **That the Executive Director of Communities and Adult Social Care, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care, the Director of Finance, and the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services be given delegated authority, to:**
 - **Procure and enter into a contract with successful tenderer(s) for the support/care services to be provided.**
The contract will be for up to 10 years (5 initial years and then up to 5 further years);
 - **Negotiate with the successful tenderer(s) to mobilise the contract, vary the contract, extend the contract at the appropriate time and otherwise contract manage the contract throughout its lifecycle.**

9. HOME CARE FRAMEWORK TENDER

The Committee received a report seeking approval to commence procurement of a new Home Care Framework to replace the current contract which would expire on 31 March 2026. The report outlined the rationale for the new framework, including the need to maintain market stability, support increasing demand, and ensure high-quality care provision aligned with the Care Act 2014.

The report explained that the new framework would be a single-lot contract running for an initial five-year term, with the option to extend for a further five years. The estimated total value of the contract was £127.7 million over the full term, based on an annual spend of £10.5 million with assumed inflation and demand growth.

The Committee noted that the new framework would introduce:

- A stronger focus on reablement and enablement.
- Flexibility to evolve the service over the contract lifecycle.
- Support for people with complex needs to remain at home.
- A formalised process for commissioning live-in care.
- Mandatory use of the Mosaic Provider Portal for electronic invoicing.
- A single-tiered framework with consistent quality standards.

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Engagement work would be undertaken with service users, including the establishment of a Home Care Working Together Group to co-produce elements of the specification and tender process.

In response to questions it was noted that home care framework providers were closely monitored and reviewed. Concerns about providers were addressed through quality monitoring, safeguarding teams and collaboration with other local authorities. Regarding supporting people in taking medications a piece of work was being led by the Integrated Care Board to train home care providers to support delegated tasks.

Resolved –

(1) That the Executive Director of Communities and Adult Social Care, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care, the Director of Finance, and the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services to be granted delegated authority to:

- **Procure and enter into a contract with the successful tenderer(s) for the support / care services to be provided. The contract will be for up to 10 years (5 initial years and then up to 5 further years).**
- **Negotiate with the successful tenderer(s) to mobilise the contract, vary the contract, extend the contract at the appropriate time, and otherwise contract manage the contract throughout its lifecycle.**

10. READING YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE ANNUAL PLAN 2025/26 AND PROGRESS ON INSPECTION IMPROVEMENT WORK

The Committee received an update on the Reading Youth Justice Service (YJS) Annual Plan for 2025/26 and progress made against the Youth Justice Service Improvement Plan following the inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) in September 2024.

The report explained that the Annual Youth Justice Plan was a statutory requirement under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and a condition of the Youth Justice Board (YJB) grant. The Plan was being finalised for submission to the YJB by 30 June 2025 and would be published on the Council's website once approved. The Plan had been developed in collaboration with the multi-agency Youth Justice Management Board (YJMB), which provided oversight and strategic direction.

The report also outlined the progress made in response to the HMIP inspection, which had rated the service as inadequate. A comprehensive Improvement Plan had been developed and submitted to HMIP in December 2024. The Plan was structured around four key pillars: Governance and Leadership; Staffing and Workforce Development; Partnership and Services; and Processes, Systems and Quality of Practice.

Key highlights included:

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- 27% reduction in first-time entrants to the youth justice system in 2024/25.
- 21% reduction in the reoffending rate, with a 46.5% drop in the number of reoffences per child.
- No custodial sentences or remands to Youth Detention Accommodation in the 12 months to March 2025.
- Strengthened governance through improved performance reporting and increased partner engagement.
- Recruitment of qualified staff, including three new practitioners and ongoing workforce development.
- Implementation of new partnership initiatives such as the Act Now project and enhanced substance misuse screening.
- Development of a new Quality Assurance Framework and local performance standards.

The report noted that the strategic objectives from the 2024/25 plan would be retained for 2025/26, including reducing first-time entrants, reoffending, use of custody, ethnic disproportionality, and serious youth violence, while embedding child-first practice and improving outcomes for victims.

The Committee were informed that the service had moved to quadrant 3 of the YJB oversight framework following the inspection, indicating it was a priority service requiring improvement. However, the YJB had acknowledged the significant progress made and indicated that the service was on track to move to quadrant 2.

The Committee welcomed the report and the improvements being made since the last report. It was noted that work had been undertaken in May last year to reduce the amount of first time entrants into the system, the increase in the recruitment of professionally qualified staff and partnership working had supported the improvement work.

Resolved –

(1) That the progress of the 2025/26 Youth Justice Service annual plan and timeframes for completion be noted;

(2) That the progress of the Youth Justice Service Improvement Plan be noted.

(The meeting closed at 9.18 pm)