

**ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING  
MINUTES - 22 MARCH 2023**

**Present:** Councillor Mpofu-Coles (Chair);  
Councillors Gavin (Vice-Chair), Ballsdon, Cresswell, Davies, Ennis, Hoskin, Kitchingham, McEwan and O'Connell

**Apologies:** Councillors C Dennis, Keane and Robinson

**27. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair noted that it was currently Social Worker Week and thanked all social workers for their work.

**28. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**29. HEALTHWATCH READING**

Alice Kunjappy-Clifton, Lead Officer, Healthwatch Reading provided an update and presentation on Healthwatch Reading. Alice explained that Healthwatch in Reading had been in place for 10 years and in June 2022, The Advocacy People, became the new providers for Healthwatch Reading. It was noted that Healthwatch was a statutory service under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the purpose of Healthwatch was to encourage people to have their say on how health and social care services were provided.

Healthwatch Reading's Workplan 2022/23 had been published on their website and members were invited to provide feedback or ask questions on the plan.

It was noted that Healthwatch had a large remit of health and social care needs for people from cradle to grave. They provided information to Healthwatch England to inform the wider national picture and had statutory powers to write to service providers with any concerns and to receive a response in 20 days. Healthwatch was also permitted to enter and view any publicly funded health and social care providers.

Recent priorities included:

- Recruitment of volunteers;
- Undertaking a national survey on maternal mental health. Recent findings showed that at GP post-natal checks mental health was not currently a priority.
- Supporting asylum seekers living in Home Office Contract Accommodation and feeding back any concerns to the Council;
- Supporting Building Berkshire Together on the public consultation on the future of the Royal Berkshire Hospital;

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- Reviewing reports by the previous Healthwatch Reading provider and follow-up on issues.

The local areas of priority for the next 12 to 15 months included:

- GP services access;
- NHS dentistry access;
- Closure of local pharmacies;
- Quality of maternity services, specifically around ethnic minority groups;
- Cost of living crisis and the impact on local people;
- Continuing Health Care (CHC) funding;
- Support for carers;
- Mental health support for children and young people.

It was noted that feedback received from the public would inform the future Healthwatch workplan.

In response to questions the following points were noted:

- Officers from Healthwatch had visited deprived communities in Reading to access feedback and to provide answers to resident's queries when possible.
- The team had received a lot of feedback from asylum seekers and officers had been working with the Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality Community Champions to support this work.
- The Committee were asked to share the work and visibility of Healthwatch.
- The role of Healthwatch was important in holding the work of Adult Social Care to account and future collaboration was suggested to consider Health issues such discharges from hospital and care packages.
- Healthwatch would be attending the Older People's Working Group.
- Healthwatch could be contacted via their new website and would also be distributing leaflets around GP surgeries, care homes, the Council offices, and other areas to make the public aware of the service.
- An invite would be sent to Healthwatch Reading to attend the Access and Disabilities Working Group.

The Chair thanked Alice for the presentation.

### **30. RBH BUILDING BERKSHIRE TOGETHER - UPDATE**

Alison Foster, Programme Director, Building Berkshire Together, gave a presentation and update on the Building Berkshire Together programme to redevelop the Royal Berkshire Hospital.

Alison explained that the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust (RBFT) were in Cohort 4 of the National Hospital Programme and full adopters of 'hospital 2.0'. This would deliver cost savings and efficiencies using a standardised approach across hospitals that would be built at the same time. It was noted that a Business Case had been submitted

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to the Treasury in 2020 for the funding allocation and three preferred options had been proposed. A funding announcement was expected within the next few weeks, and this was anticipated to be a positive outcome for Reading. It was reported that work to develop the business case options had been undertaken over the previous two years with consultation and engagement. A recent feedback event at Reading Town Hall had provided advice and comments for consideration from partners and members of the public.

In response to questions the following points were noted:

- The carbon impact of a new hospital would be considered as part of the business case. The aim would be to build a carbon neutral hospital and consideration was being given to modern methods of construction. The University of Reading had been asked to help provide expertise in these areas.
- The carbon impact of patients, visitors and staff travelling to and from the hospital would also be factored into the business case. Alison confirmed that travel and transport was a priority when considering the location of the hospital.
- Part of the new programme would be to manage the market and supply of labour for the new hospital build; linking social value and economic development to the area.
- It was suggested that the new hospital should be accessible for Reading residents by bus and rail, and consideration be given to people that did not drive. However, Alison explained that there was a lack of available land near the current hospital site, and it was a challenge to find a site for the new hospital in and around Reading. However, this would continue to be investigated.
- The 'hospital 2.0' project would be fully digitally enabled. Work had been undertaken with Healthwatch and community leaders to gather information from groups who did not use technology so that they could provide feedback and their views be considered.

The Chair thanked Alison for the presentation.

### **31. CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT**

The Executive Director of Children's Services, Education, Early Help and Social Care, Brighter Futures for Children, submitted a report on the main findings of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (CSA) for 2022/23. The annual report provided information for parents, childcare providers and Brighter Futures for Children on childcare needs, the local childcare market and future school places demand.

The main findings included the following:

- 96% of providers had been judged as good or outstanding by Ofsted.
- The annual Parents Survey 2022 had shown that 87% of parents/carers were satisfied with their choice of childcare provision.
- There were sufficient childcare places for all 0-4-year-olds.

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- Providers reported immediate vacancies which was an indicator that parents were waiting for their preferred provision.
- 93% of parents/carers were able to find the type of childcare they wanted in their local area.
- Early years providers reported that places were most influenced by the physical space available, followed by qualified staff vacancies and meeting needs of existing children.
- Funding rates were identified as the greatest threat to the sustainability of early years providers followed by rising energy costs.
- Rising food costs were identified as the greatest threat to the sustainability of out of school providers followed by a drop in parental demand.
- RBC's 5-year housing plan had identified the town centre and Whitley ward as areas to monitor regarding future growth. This could lead to an increase in the number of families over the next few years in line with housing development.
- Parent/carers who reported that their childcare requirements had changed as an impact of the Covid pandemic were in the minority this year at 20%, a reduction from 31% last year.
- 50% of parent/carer responses had indicated that they were satisfied with current fees, the remaining 50% were not satisfied. In this financial year 57% of early years providers and 41% of out of school providers reported that they had set a fee increase.

It was noted that childcare providers had reported issues with staff shortages and problems with recruiting to the sector. Full details regarding the recent government announcement were yet to be released, however, childcare providers had raised concern regarding the rates that would be paid by the government for free childcare places in comparison to staff costs and if the funding would be able to address this issue. Also, that whilst the survey indicated that most families could find childcare in their local area this was not always the case.

It was noted that Reading was an area of high cost, and the key issue was staffing shortages in the sector which could become an area of concern and priority for the future. The Early Years' Service provides a range of supports to the sector to assist providers with their business planning as well as priority areas for service development, including staff development. Also, it was noted that good early year's childcare provision was important in the development of children.

In response to a query, it was reported that the Council offered support for recruitment into the childcare sector with information in schools on career pathways into the sector. Regarding the low take up of Tax-Free Childcare schemes, the Council would be providing leaflets to childcare providers for parents and by providing information through the Reading Family Information Service.

Concern was raised regarding the government's proposed change in the ratio of adult carers to the number of children and how childcare sufficiency would be measured. Some providers had already expressed concern regarding these new ratios and that they would not be applying them in their own units as they did not feel they best met the needs of

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the children. The details on how childcare sufficiency would be affected and if funding would be based on the new ratios had not yet been determined.

It was suggested that details regarding the financial cost of working, in comparison to the cost of childcare and affordability, be included in future reports.

**Resolved - That the Reading Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022-23 be noted and endorsed.**

(The meeting closed at 7.37 pm)

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