

**ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES - 17 JANUARY 2024**

Present: Councillor Mpofu-Coles (Chair);

Councillors Gavin (Vice-Chair), Cresswell, Davies, Edwards, Gittings, Hoskin, Keane, McEwan, O'Connell, Robinson, Tarar and Woodward

Apologies: Councillors Ballsdon and McGoldrick

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Davies declared an interest in item 11 as a close family member received the Home to School Transport provision.

Councillor Cresswell declared an interest in item 11 relating to his work in the alternative provision education sector.

22. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 October were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

23. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The minutes of the following meeting were received:

- Health and Wellbeing Board - 6 October 2023

24. MENTAL HEALTH UPDATE

The Committee received a report on the mental health and neurodiversity service provision, including waiting times and trends. These were provided across three specific areas of provision: working age adult services, children and young people's mental health, and neurodiversity. The presentation was provided by Kishan Waas, Service Director Mental Health Community Services, Louise Noble, Service Director to LD and CAMHS and Karen Cridland, Divisional Director Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

The presentation included information on:

- Working Age Adult Services
 - ARRS - recruitment of specialist primary care mental health practitioners under the additional roles reimbursement scheme (ARRS) to work within GP surgeries and offer triage, assessment, and signposting to primary care patients who present with a mental health need.

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- Let's Connect - a social network to support the wellbeing of citizens over the age of 18 by connecting with each other, with organisations and services and with the many opportunities in the community.
- IAPT - the NHS Talking Therapies, for anxiety and depression programme (formerly known as Improving Access to Psychological Therapies, IAPT) aimed to improve the delivery of, and access to, evidence-based, NICE recommended, psychological therapies for depression and anxiety disorders within the NHS. Reading referral and waiting times for Talking Therapies for 2023 was 92% of clients started treatment within seven weeks of referral.
- Mental Health Integrated Community Service (MHICS) - offered a service to patients in primary care with significant mental health difficulties who previously would have fallen in the gap between primary and secondary care. The referral and waiting times for this service were an average of 2 weeks.
- Community Mental Health Teams (CMHT) - a non-integrated service provided care and treatment for people with serious mental health difficulties, including but not limited to psychotic illnesses, mood and personality disorders, and other disorders. The referral and waiting time for Care Coordination was four weeks and psychiatry assessments 9.1 weeks.
- Individual Placement & Support Employment Service (IPS) - an employment support service integrated within CMHTs, MHICS, and EIP for people who experienced severe mental health conditions. It was an evidence-based service that aimed to help people find and retain employment.
- Early Intervention in Psychosis (EIP) - a team that provided specialist treatment and care for people aged between 14 and 65 who had signs of psychosis.
- Crisis Resolution Home Treatment Teams (CRHTT) - a service that provided intensive support for patients experiencing an acute or 'crisis' episode during their mental illness. The service was available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- Intensive Management of Personality Disorders and Clinical Therapies (IMPACTT) - to help patients better understand personality disorders and support with developing coping strategies to help manage the difficulties with both emotions, and interpersonal issues.
- Liaison and Diversion (L&D) - identified people who had mental health, learning disability, substance misuse or other vulnerabilities when they first came into contact with the criminal justice system as suspects, defendants or offenders.
- Reconnect - a care after custody service for adults, to improve the continuity of care of people leaving prison or an immigration removal centre (IRC) with an identified health need.
- SUN - a user network offering support through peer groups, with people helping others by using their own experiences as a guide for others.
- Context and challenges of the services included demand and capacity, workforce challenges, staff burnout, complex presentations, differing thresholds and variations in financial offer.
- Service Transformation - The development of Project One Team to transform Berkshire's Mental Health offer in line with the NHS Long Term Plan. This would build upon the work already done by the Community Mental Health Transformation Programmes to create a brand-new model for Berkshire.

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- Children and Young People Mental Health Services
 - Berkshire Healthcare were commissioned to provide evidence-based mental health services for children and adolescents across the West of Berkshire. The THRIVE framework conceptualised five needs-based groupings for young people with mental health issues and their families. Under the Thrive framework, most services provided in Reading were within the Getting More Help and Getting Risk Support needs-based groupings.
 - Berkshire Health did not provide school based mental health services or primary mental health services in Reading but were commissioned to provide specialist expertise as part of the mental health in schools' service.
 - The total number of referrals to the service from the Reading locality had increased by approximately 7% since 2019 (pre-pandemic). This was similar to the national picture and to other areas of Berkshire.
 - Approximately 12% of the service caseload were Reading children and young people.
 - There were no national access and waiting time standards for general CAMH services. However, national guidance had been introduced to provide a standard definition of waiting.
 - In 2023 mean waiting times were 10 weeks and 21 weeks for routine referrals.
 - Berkshire Healthcare services were meeting targets in relation to eating disorders and early intervention in psychosis services.
 - New services included CAMHS Children in Care Service, Extended CAMHS Crisis Service, Berkshire Link Team, and the CAMHS Learning Disability Service.

- Neurodiversity Services
 - Berkshire Healthcare provided the diagnostic service and medication support for children/young people with ADHD. However, many of their needs were met by other providers across the system.
 - Referrals for autism and ADHD services outstripped the service capacity which resulted in large numbers waiting and long waits. This was a national picture with services across the country facing similar pressures.
 - Services experienced more complex presentations for both adults and children/young people and reducing waiting times remained a top priority.
 - Assessments completed during the financial year indicated the 48% waited up to two years and 52% waited 3-4+ years.
 - Actions and support included a holistic assessment, prioritisation of referrals, ongoing programme of quality improvement service transformation, increased capacity of qualified staff, early needs led support, collaboration and shared learning, reducing wait for annual ADHA medication review for adults, reducing autism assessment process, ADHA post diagnostic support options for adults and quality improvement projects.

The Committee discussed the report and raised concern at the two-year waiting list for referrals. In response it was reported that investment in resources had reduced the

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waiting lists down to two years and support was provided to individuals ahead of diagnosis if necessary.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and presentation, and requested an update be provide at a future meeting

Resolved - That an update be provide at to a future meeting.

25. ADULT SOCIAL CARE 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 2022 to 31 March 2023. A summary of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2022/23 was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report stated that over the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 the service had received 10 corporate complaints, which was a 50% significant decrease compared to the 20 received in 2021/22, and 89 statutory complaints, which was a 4.3% decrease compared to the 93 that had been received in 2021/22. There was also one request for a corporate Stage 2 investigation during the period.

The main themes for the period 2022/23 for both corporate and statutory complaints were:

- Quality of Service Provided
- Staff Conduct
- Communication

Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman received five representations from dissatisfied service users for issues relating to Adult Care & Health Services, which was two less than the previous year. Of the five cases, four were investigated and fault found, and one case was assessed and not further investigated. The LGSCO did not issue any formal reports finding maladministration by the Council.

In the year 2022/23, 42 compliments were received in comparison to the previous year when only ten were recorded. Teams complimented by service users included - AMHP and Forensic Team, Adult Safeguarding team, Occupational therapists (OT), D2A team, Review team and the Mental Health Team.

It was noted that information on how to make a complaint was publicised and made available to service users.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report be noted.**

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- (2) That the action taken in response to learning from complaints, as described in the summary of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2022/23, attached at Appendix A to the report, be noted.**

26. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE 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 for the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. An addendum to the report provided a summary of learning and improvements made within the children's social care service as a result of complaints during 2022/23. Nayana George, Customer Relations and Information Governance Officer, provided an overview to the Committee.

The report stated that over the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 the service has received 77 statutory complaints, which was an increase of 18.46% compared to the 65 received in 2021/22. Of the 77 complaints received 10 (13%) had been resolved through alternative dispute resolution (ADR) by the social care teams. The remaining 67 (87.0%) had progressed to a formal investigation, although one of these had been subsequently withdrawn by the complainant once the investigation had commenced. The top complaint themes were staff conduct, quality of service and procedures.

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

Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO) received 23 representations from dissatisfied service users for issues relating to BFfC. This was an increase of seven from the previous year. The LGSCO assessed nine of the cases for investigation, five cases were upheld, and two cases were not upheld. One was awaiting an outcome and one was yet to be investigated.

In respect of the five upheld complaints, the LGSCO asked the Council/BFfC to apologise and provided financial redress. They also recommended some service improvements. Of the remaining 14 cases, 11 were assessed but not investigated as they were either out of time, not within the LGSCO's jurisdiction to investigate, or closed after initial enquiry/assessment. Three cases were deemed premature and passed back to BFfC to investigate as they had not progressed through the complaints' procedures.

The LGSCO would be issuing one formal report finding maladministration by BFfC, however this would not be published to safeguard the complainant. It was noted that the matter had been scrutinised by the BFfC Board, CMT and Lead Councillors. All comments and learning would be addressed, and reassurance had been sent to the LGSCO.

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

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During 2022/23, the Customer Relations Team received 59 Subject Access Requests (SARs) for children's social care cases and Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) cases. This was 21 more than the 38 requests received in 2021/22 relating to BfC. It was reported that at the time of the ACE Committee meeting of the 59 requests received 52 had been completed, four were closed as invalid requests and three remaining cases were waiting to be processed.

It was reported that the Council and BfC had worked closely to drive improvements in the services offered to children and young people and to signpost to information on advocacy, early resolution and the complaints procedures. However, it was recognised that there was always room for improvement and work was continuing to better the services offered to children and families.

It was noted that the statutory process regarding recording of responding to complaints within timescales was very strict and did not consider delays relating to the complainant or staff sickness absence. However, service wide training sessions were being undertaken for new managers to explain the process and importance of responding to complaints on time. Also, weekly reports were provided to senior managers to chase any outstanding responses to complaints.

Subject Access Requests records were usually requested for historical reasons by individuals, solicitors for court processes and repetitive complainants. Reasons for the backlog in processing requests were usually due to the work involved to check records for third party information and redaction, checking for sensitive information that could cause distress, and information that was legally privileged. It was noted that new software for redaction work had been procured to support staff in processes the records.

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.**
- (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.**

27. LEAVING CARE SERVICE ACTION PLAN

The Committee received a report providing progress made on achieving the actions identified in the Brighter Futures for Children Leaving Care Action Plan 2023/2024. This was drawn up in April 2023 in response to a review of the service undertaken by the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers, Mark Riddell MBE in March 2023. It detailed actions already achieved, those that are being worked on and those that are proving more challenging to progress. The BfC Leaving Care Service Action Plan 2023-24 was appended to the report at Appendix 1.

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The review focussed on:

- Corporate Parenting Panel
- Education, employment, and training
- Housing
- Health
- Transition to adulthood
- Local offer to care leavers.

The visit identified strengths and areas for improvement and a partnership action plan was implemented. This ensured that, collectively, BfFC, the Council and the wider partnership were championing and meeting the needs of children in care and care leavers. On the 13 July 2023 the action plan was endorsed by Corporate Parenting Panel, chaired by Councillor Hoskin, and was supported by senior leaders across BfFC and the Council.

Three key areas of activity included:

- The Corporate Parenting Panel Terms of Reference (ToR) had been updated in partnership with panel members and children in care.
- Reading Borough Council's sliding scale of council tax exemptions for care leavers up to the age of 21 would be extended to 25 years (to reflect the corporate parenting duties of the local authority continuing to this age. The financial impact of the proposal had been included in the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and 2024/2025 budget.
- A proposal for 'care experience' to be recognised as a protected characteristic by Reading Borough Council.

Other actions included consultation with young people who were looked after by BfFC or recent care leavers, increased housing offer for care leavers, developing the Council's apprenticeship 'offer' to care leavers, and a clearer 'pathway' for care leavers transitioning to adult social care services.

It was noted that work was ongoing in all areas of the action plan however, some actions were proving more challenging to progress. These included employing a participation apprentice /champions on a full-time basis in the participation unit or leaving care team. This was to help drive the local offer from each key partner agency and engage with care leavers aged up to 25 years and represent their views. Due to funding implications this was providing difficult to prioritise. Also, obtaining free prescriptions, dental and eye care for care leavers up to 25 years was not able to be funded by health partners. It was noted that this would be explored further at the Corporate Parenting Panel in January 2024.

Actions in the BfFC Leaving Care Service Action Plan 2023/24 were being systematically addressed and reasonable progress was being achieved in most areas. However current financial pressures placed restrictions on what could realistically be achieved in some

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areas at this time. Support would be sought from community partners in the hope of broadening some aspects of the care leavers' 'offer'.

The Plan would be reviewed on a bi-monthly basis with relevant managers in BfC and the Participation Officer.

It was agreed that an update on the action plan be provided on an annual basis to the Committee.

Resolved -

- (1) The progress made on the leaving care action plan and current priorities be noted.**
- (2) That an update be provided to the ACE Committee on an annual basis.**

28. SCHOOL ADMISSIONS POLICY

The Committee received a report that invited the Committee to agree the determination of school admissions arrangements for September 2025 as follows:

- The admission arrangements for Community Primary Schools in Reading for the school year 2025/26.
- The coordinated scheme for primary schools for the 2025/26 school year.
- The coordinated scheme for secondary schools for the 2025/26 school year.
- The Primary catchment areas
- The Relevant Area 2025/26

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

Resolved -

- (1) That the scheme attached at Annexes A, B and C to the report as the admission arrangements for 2025/26 for community schools in Reading and the local arrangements for complying with the national coordinated primary school admission procedures for the allocation of primary school places for residents of Reading Borough be agreed.**
- (2) That the scheme attached at Annex D to the report, as the local arrangements for complying with the national coordinated secondary admissions procedure for the allocation of secondary school places for 2025/26 for residents of Reading Borough be agreed.**
- (3) That the relevant area as attached in Annex E to the report, which sets out the organisations that must be consulted for any admission arrangements for schools in Reading be agreed.**

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29. HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

The Committee received a report to consider a proposed consultation on the School Transport Policy for 2024, with changes in the policy aiming to clarify language and promoting the most active travel for Reading pupils.

The policy clarification points included:

- That 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 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 report explained that parents were responsible for ensuring their child attended school. This meant that parents must take all the action necessary to enable their child to attend school. For most, this included making arrangements for their child to travel to and from school. The Statutory Guidance was clear that Local Authorities must make arrangements, free-of-charge, for eligible children to travel to school.

Brighter Futures for Children, on behalf of Reading Borough Council, were wanting to support more children to engage in active travel, as part of a fulfilling childhood helping young people develop and move towards independence. This would include reducing journeys to school by car, by working with families, schools, local communities and transport planners to encourage students to walk or cycle to school or, where this is not feasible, to encourage greater use of public transport.

It was reported that School Transport had been a significant budget and growth pressure in Reading for the past two years. Local Authorities across England were experiencing continued demand and cost pressures regarding school transport and local pressures were in line with national increases in demand and cost increases. These included continued increases in numbers of children with SEND, leading to an increase in the number of children needing transport assistance to school. Including children needing to go further afield to be provided with an appropriate education placement. With these demand and growth pressures action needed to be taken to make savings across the School Transport budget.

It is proposed to consult on the School Transport Policy for 2024 to help deliver savings and to promote the most active and independent forms of travel, increasing and promoting independence for young people on their journey to adulthood and independent living, in line with the Council's policies and strategic aims to promote independence.

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It was noted that following the consultation a report would be provided to ACE Committee with the results of the consultation and to then consider approval of a revised School Transport policy.

Resolved -

- (1) That consultation on School Transport policy clarification be agreed, 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.

- (2) That the format and process of consultation be delegated to the Executive Director, Children's Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Children's Services and the Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health.

(Councillor Davies declared an interest in the item and left the meeting as a close family member received Home to School Transport provision.)

(Councillor Cresswell declared an interest in item 11 relating to working with children in the alternative provision education sector that use the service, but did not leave the meeting.)

30. MAIDEN ERLEGH CHILTERN EDGE SCHOOL TRANSPORT

The Committee received a report to consult on revising the School Transport Policy to remove free transport entitlement for pupils attending Maiden Erleigh Chiltern Edge school.

The report explained that with the opening in September 2024 of the new River Academy secondary school in Reading this would secure sufficient local secondary places for all Reading children. It was therefore appropriate to review the free transport provision for Maiden Erleigh Chiltern school.

It was proposed that the policy change would remove eligibility for children not yet in receipt or eligible for transport. The options for consultation were as follows:

- Fully removing eligibility from September 2024. This would achieve a full saving of £264,000 per year. This was currently the recommended option, due to the current savings required on School Transport budgets.

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- A planned reduction of between one and two buses a year, to cancel all four buses within a three-year period. A three-year reduction would lead to projected savings of £90,000 per year from September 2024. The planned reduction proposals could be based on year group eligibility or on reducing geographical area eligibility.

The proposed statutory 28-day consultation period would take place during term-time across January - March 2024 with implementation of policy changes from September 2024. The consultation would include dedicated engagement sessions with parents of children attending Chiltern Edge secondary school.

Resolved -

- (1) 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 agreed.**
- (2) That the format and process of consultation be delegated to the Executive Director, Children's Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Children's Services and the Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health.**

(The meeting closed at 9.21 pm)