

**BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL**  
**CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 January 2021 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr R Burton – Chairman  
Cllr L Lewis – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr E Coope, Cllr B Dunlop, Cllr N C Geary, Cllr J Kelly, Cllr S Moore, Cllr L Northover, Cllr S Phillips, Cllr R Rocca, Mr S Welch, Mr M Saxby and Ms E Hall

Co-Opted Members: Mr N Collins, Ms S Lockard, Ms A Brandon, Ms G Grogan, Mr P Martin, Mr S Welch, Mr M Saxby and Ms E Hall.

Also in attendance: Elaine Redding – Corporate Director for Children’s Services  
Rebecca McDade – Children and Young People Development Worker – Participation  
Neil Goddard – Director of Quality and Commissioning  
Anthony Douglas – Department for Education Representative  
Joseph Tyler - Democratic and Overview and Scrutiny Officer / Cler  
Cllr N Greene – Portfolio Holder for Covid Resilience, Public Health and Education  
Cllr M White – Portfolio Holder for Childrens.

120. Apologies

There were no apologies for this meeting.

121. Substitute Members

There were no substitute members for this meeting.

122. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest for this meeting.

123. Confirmation of Minutes

**RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1 December 2020, having been previously circulated, be signed by the Chairman and confirmed as a correct record.**

124. Action Sheet

The Chair referred to two actions that were outstanding: the report on children carrying knives and the Local Government Peer Review. Both were yet to be circulated to members and would require actioning. **Action**

**The action sheet was noted.**

125. Public Issues

There were no public issues for this meeting.

126. Covid- 19 Impact and recovery - Mental Health and impact of returning to school

The Director of Quality and Commissioning for BCP Council presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The report related to the first national lockdown, during the Spring and Summer months of 2020.

The report detailed the work that the Council had undertaken to support professionals and families with the September 2020 return to school, after the first national lockdown. The Director of Quality and Commissioning gave an overview of this work and provided further information on the Staying Connected surveys and the materials that were produced to support the return to school. The key points of the presentation were:

- The Local Authority had produced materials for parents and educational professionals detailing the support that would be provided in the return to schools in September 2020.
- Two surveys were undertaken relating to children with SEND.
- Feedback from the surveys highlighted anxiety, isolation and lack of structure as the main impact on wellbeing.
- Work was undertaken between the Local Authority and local schools to best meet the needs of children not attending school to continue with the education offer delivered at home.
- The remote learning offer had developed over the course of the lockdown; however, the Local Authority must be aware of the impact of lockdown on children and the effects of not being in school.
- It was hoped that children would be able to transition back to school successfully and pick back up on the experiences and socialisation they had missed.

Members of the Youth Parliament that were present provided some further information to the Committee. The Committee heard that the Youth Parliament had:

- Conducted research into children's responses to lockdown. These included the use of questionnaires and social media polls.
- Overall, the prominent feelings of children were that of anxiety, stress and uncertainty.
- Many changes had taken place since the initial return to schools in September 2020 and with the situation changing rapidly, more needs to be done to assess the feelings of children affected.
- More than half the children surveyed said that they felt the remote education was unsatisfactory and that the loss of the classroom environment was the biggest negative impact.

- Extra-curricular classes and activities were a big part of children's lives prior to the pandemic and these opportunities had stopped for almost a year.

The Committee discussed the Report. Comments, questions and answers heard included:

- How was wellbeing of children being monitored and was best practice advice being shared? The Committee heard that monitoring of the educational offer was a prime part of the monitoring process. This offer had developed over time alongside the monitoring of schools and quality assurance. For mental health, vulnerable children are tracked individually, and work is done with schools to ensure these children receive the necessary support. This is a large number of children and it therefore required a partnership between the school and Children's Services to identify all of the children in need of help. The rapid nature of changes to education and school closures made it difficult to assess and analyse the effects of lockdown on children, as was seen with the one day before nationwide school closures in January 2021.
- What consideration was given to children with protected characteristics and their support needs? The Committee were informed that there is always consideration given to children with protected characteristics and assistance has been requested for the health service for reassurance on the challenges faced by those of a protected group when it came to COVID-19. It was acknowledged by the Committee that throughout the pandemic, members of protected groups had faced increased challenges due to the pandemic and that this was no less the case when it came to supporting children who were out of school and in lockdown.
- When it came to mental health support it was acknowledged that any child could face difficulties and that support must be provided for all who require it.
- The informative materials supplied to parents and education professionals detailing support that was in place for children was deemed useful and officers were confident it was made available for the target audience. A request was made by a member of the Youth Parliament for a similar resource to be made for children. The Committee heard that this was a helpful suggestion and could be explored.
- What proportion of parents and relevant carers responded to the Staying Connected surveys? The Director of Quality and Commissioning explained that the number of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) across the conurbation was 4000 and that 78 parent/carers had responded. The limited time frame meant that information had to be gathered swiftly and immediately used to for overview of the situation. The Local Authority publicised the survey through the parent-carer forum and made available through schools. It was heard that this matter was a useful exercise in getting a feel for parent experience and that it should be revisited now that term was underway. The survey gave a short

sharp insight into the community and the information was triangulated with feedback from schools and partners.

- Had sufficient technology and equipment been supplied to those families that needed it? The Committee were told that before Christmas, during the Autumn term, the Government scheme to provide laptops to vulnerable children had seen the Local Authority acquire and distribute 1200 laptops alongside the work of the Virtual School put in place to assist children. It was explained that, with the move to a comprehensive remote offer, the Government scheme sought to support children where there was an outbreak or a high need for such equipment. A member of the Youth Parliament informed the Committee that they were aware of potential issues with broadband and the impact that this would have on learners. The Committee were told that it was vitally important that schools provide access to lessons and learning resources at both the point of delivery and afterwards. This was in case there were any issues with a learner's internet access where they needed to revisit the lesson or learning materials at a later time. Members heard that during the first lockdown, the Government had run a scheme to issue 4G dongles to learners to help provide internet access through mobile phone network. After Christmas, the Government have sought to provide discounted access to a 4G or 3G network via mobile phones.
- What support was being given to teachers regarding their wellbeing? The Director of Quality and Commissioning explained that teachers were having to provide in-classroom teaching as well as remote learning for those pupils learning from home. The Portfolio Holder for COVID Resilience, Public Health and Education added that lot of new skills and expectations were being placed on teachers and their mental health must be recognised and supported going forward. Teachers also suffered from the lack of interaction and classroom experience. The Portfolio Holder agreed that involvement from the Youth Parliament would be beneficial and that there would be a £1million investment in the Council's budget toward support young people, their wellbeing and their transition back to school. Some Winter grant fund money from Government would be targeted at helping holiday activities and support clubs. The Portfolio Holder gave a commitment on supporting Young People on these issues and during this time

The Chairman provided a summary of the discussion that had taken place and emphasised the key points were as follows:

- Online Learning and consistency of provision.
- Sharing of best practice.
- Learners with protected characteristics.
- Response levels to survey.
- Young people's interest in being surveyed.
- Technical equipment for remote learners
- Funding available for remote learners.

**Resolved that the Committee**

**(a) note the materials that were produced to support professionals and families with the transition of local authority pupils back into school following lockdown and**

**(b) note the outcomes of the surveys that were undertaken in relation to this work.**

127. Recent Ofsted visit outcome

The Interim Corporate Director for Children's Services at BCP Council presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The report related to the visit to Children's Services made by Ofsted in October 2020, the serious concerns in the quality of services and the subsequent 15-point action plan - is the response to those concerns.the first national lockdown, during the Spring and Summer months of 2020. The Interim Corporate Director for Children's Services gave an overview of this work and provided further information on the Action Plan and the position after four months post-Ofsted inspection. The key points of the presentation were:

- 4 Months on from the October 2020 Ofsted inspection the service area are continuing to make improvements. The entire academic year had been disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however the ambition of service area remains high and the throughout whole department relentless in their focus on the areas that were deemed in need of improvement, such as Corporate Parenting and Young People. The Committee heard that as system leaders there is an imperative to provide whatever is needed by young people.
- Some of the service area's staff were prioritised for the vaccine and there had been an increase in positive tests as the testing rates increased. The Action Plan does consider potential reductions in workforce due to COVID-19.
- The most significant change in the 4-month period was on service area clarity and how the service orders their work. There were now processes in place that were clear and linear, so that staff and families could understand what work was being done, why and where, which was considered the bedrock of good practice by a Local Authority.
- Keeping spirits and energy levels high within the service area was key to maintaining good leadership and workforce activity.

The Department for Education representative gave further detail around the 4-month progress of the Action Plan which included:

- That the service has made a good start and there is strong political commitment to the plan, including cross party support.
- The plan contains 7 'obsessions' and 15 action points, which is the irreducible minimum so that all areas are delivered simultaneously.

- Progress had taken place within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which was heavily criticised by Ofsted last year. The services have been changed enough so that the right children were getting to the right service quicker. The family court application process, to remove children from parents where necessary, had also improved. These applications were much better handled, scrutinised and performance managed. Therefore, the service can improve as shown by such examples.
- Improvements and changes should not happen too rapidly as there is a risk that staff could be alienated, and morale could decrease.
- COVID-19 and lockdown had limited the progress that could have taken place, however it was important that the service continued to make steady progress/.
- An improvement in the quality of front-line practice is what Ofsted are looking for next. Improving processes to have less delay and more focus will help, this is no guarantee though.

The Committee discussed the Report. Comments, questions and answers heard included:

- A Committee member asked how the Council could be better corporate parents. The Interim Corporate Director for Children's Services welcomed suggestions and personal input from Councillors on this matter and encouraged that any members able to should offer to help the Corporate Parenting service 'love and care for a child that is not yours", be this through employment opportunities or other support measures. The Committee agreed to arrange a communication to go out to all Councillors on this matter. **Action**
- A question was posed on staff morale and staff turnover within the service. The Interim Corporate Director for Children's Services clarified that pressures were not limited to the workloads. Good social workers will stay if they feel supported, as work is emotionally draining. Recruitment and retention payment has been well received and made the Council's employment offer competitive. There were a combination of factors and creating an environment for social work to flourish is certainly one of them. The Committee heard that the service must invest in their staff and give opportunities to staff to assist in shaping the service they deliver. Across the service, which employs 1100 staff, there were some very happy and well performing teams and some in crises. It was found that many staff members loved the job but didn't love the organisation which was down to past failures. The most important factor now is to get leadership and management correct in order to restore confidence over time. Members were told that the service must deal with any and all issues as they occur and as improvements take place, rather than ignoring them until later in time. A forum had been set up to gauge views of children and staff to track experience and see if these areas were getting better. What was found initially is that there was a high sickness level and subsequently a high utilisation of agency staff. A Committee member endorsed this view and stated

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that culture is as important as strategy and that there must be a change in culture and ensure children are at heart of everything.

- One member asked a question on transparency and the MOSAIC system that the service used. It was explained that the system had caused issues. The system, if implemented properly and not corrupted by work arounds, is a system that good and outstanding Local Authorities use. The lack of clarity had manifested itself in the work-flow section of the system. Due to this, the service were migrating the care director cases onto mosaic and actioning at level of appropriate pace and some problem points within the system would be removed.
- The Committee heard about the partnership academy and that meetings with staff and groups such as the parent carer forum were underway. It is important to include people in policy development and the academy was envisaged as a multi agency to ensure that frontline staff are trained and supported to the highest levels of practice. The Committee were informed by the representative from the Department for Learning that the work ongoing for the partnership academy would match the ambition of the Council in order to create a place of learning and development, for everybody.
- The Interim Corporate Director for Children's Services explained the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer. The officer provides high support and challenge to social workers and managers on the progression of plans for young people. The officer should be aware of the young people with specific needs and the areas that the service may have weaknesses in the consistency of knowing or assessing the needs of young people. This sits outside of the 15 point action-plan. Work was ongoing between the Head of Quality Assurance and the Independent Reviewing Officer to understand in detail how to engage with young people and affect change with pace and purpose. A sense of urgency was needed in that area of service and the example given was the court work.
- A Member asked a question on the various levels of corporate input into the service. It was heard that the whole Local Authority should be considered a 'family business' in which employment and apprenticeship opportunities could be provided. Issues in Children's Services were the remit of the entire Local Authority. The responsibility to improve the service stretches from the Leader of the Council to every member of staff. There is a high level of support from the corporate management and the focal point was the development of a care leavers'. This would enable young people and care leavers a place to drop into and call their own. Much of this work derived from the Regeneration & Economy Directorate. Work would also include the SEND cohort, to enable the Council to look after more people. The Chief Executive has the remit and responsibility for this and had been working with firms across and outside the Council to support vulnerable and looked after children
- The Committee heard that there was an aim to improve the quality of educational and healthcare plan assessments and that there had been a thorough quality assurance framework that regularly looks at assessments. There are around eight assessments a month and

now simple processes have been put in to help proofread and edit drafts before they are sent to parents. Some slight improvement was seen in the last month but would be an ongoing piece of work that required the focus from partners. A report would go to the Improvement Board containing more information on the EHCP assessments. This report would be made available to the Committee to better show the mature auditing framework no in place. **Action**

- It was heard that the Council utilised Ofsted grades to measure the success of the service. The current, most important measure was to reduce the inadequate work and increase good or outstanding work. There had been an upward movement in the last few months which was an initial indication of a move toward the next grade.
- On permanent school exclusions, the Committee heard that there were regular meetings with headteachers held and that there is a school inclusion team. It was explained that more needed to be done and that the aim should be for there to be zero permanent school expulsions.
- On the steps to reduce inequalities, Members were informed that the action-plan be consolidated with the Children and Young People plan, most likely in 2021-2023. It was a statutory requirement that the Council produce the plan by April. It is a two-year program to bridge gaps faced by disproportionately affected groups. The £1m recovery programme can't be spent on schools but can be channelled on reduction of opportunities gap faced by children. This investment was currently out for consultation now, looking to populate the detail after, but will be to try reducing inequalities over a two-year period.

The Chair summarised the main points of the discussion, which were as followed:

- The report was a 4-month progress insight into the 2-year improvement timeframe.
- Corporate Parenting and how Councillors can engage with it.
- Staff morale – using staff surveys and assessing workloads with a view to making improvements.
- MOSAIC workflows.
- The Academy; multi agency partnership.
- Independent scrutiny and it's role and remit.
- Apprenticeships – their importance and viewing the Council as a family business.
- Exclusions rates and targets.
- The casework grading system based on Ofsted's model.
- Inequalities to improve over the 2-year period.

**Resolved that the Committee note the content of the report and consider how it wishes to scrutinise delivery of the Action Plan over the next few months.**



The Director of Quality and Commissioning presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'C' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The report related to the proposed increase in local capacity at BCP maintained schools to meet the assessed educational needs of children and young people with SEND and to reduce pressure on the High Needs Budget.

The Director of Quality and Commissioning explained that there was pressure on the High Needs Budget and that many schools were full or oversubscribed, despite the Council having created additional units. The next proposal was for Winchelsea Satellite at Somerford Primary. It is proposed that the number of places provided by Winchelsea School will increase during the academic year 2021/22. The school will increase through the addition of a satellite provision. This provision will add up to 60 Key Stage 1/2 at Somerford Primary School. These places will be able to meet the needs of children placed at Winchelsea School.

There had been a good level of responses to the public consultation on the matter. The Council understood the concerns raised and were now in a position to submit the proposal to go through due process. The Committee heard that the Council were confident they would come through with a good offer.

The Chair summarised that the Committee were reassured by the update and their concerns had been addressed.

**RESOLVED that the Committee agree to the proposal to establish a new satellite of Winchelsea School at the Somerford Primary School site without objection.**

129. Items for Information

130. Forward Plan

A Committee Member referred to the Health and Adult Social Care O&S Committee and suggested that two of the items featured at their meetings, which worked effectively, be added to the Children's Services O&S Committee Forward Plan as standing items. The items were:

1) A Portfolio Holder update (To receive any updates from the relevant Portfolio Holders on key issues or actions that have been taken since the last meeting, as appropriate). **Action**

2) COVID-19 update (For the Committee to receive an update on COVID-19, to enable the Committee to monitor the ongoing pandemic and scrutinise the ongoing response). **Action**

The Chairman acknowledged the suggestion and explained that this would be explored with the relevant officers.

131. Dates of Future Meetings

**Resolved that the Committee note the dates of their future meetings.**

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

CHAIRMAN