

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

Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 September 2021 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr R Burton – Chair

Cllr L Lewis – Vice-Chair

Present: Cllr E Coope, Cllr B Dunlop, Cllr J Kelly, Cllr S Moore, Cllr Dr F Rice,
Cllr S Gabriel and Cllr P Hilliard

Co-Opted

Members: Mr S Welch, Mr P Martin, N Collins and G Grogan

Also in

attendance: Cllr N Greene and Cllr M White

32. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Geary, Northover and Rocca and Mark Saxby.

33. Substitute Members

Councillor Hilliard substituted for Councillor Geary.

34. Declarations of Interests

Councillors Hilliard, Kelly, Dr Rice and Moore declared interests as Governors and Trustees at schools within the BCP conurbation.

35. Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 27 July 2021, having previously been circulated, be agreed and signed by the Chair.

36. Action Sheet

The Chair advised that the actions outstanding were being progressed.

37. Public Issues

A public question had been received as follows:

“In light of the Ofsted recommendations, will you now be urgently reassessing the cases of children in BCP care to return them to birth families where possible (especially where the necessary early support was not given in the first place), do you agree that neurodivergent parents

should receive any additional support, and do you feel that investing in such support would be better, especially for the children's long term needs, than opting to keep funding long term care costs?"

Received from Mr Tinsley. Address supplied.

Response:

Thank you very much for your question. Having read the OFSTED report and recommendations, along with your question, I very much appreciate the sentiment of the question but am not sure precisely which Ofsted recommendations it refers. I will, however, endeavour to give you the fullest possible answer to each of your points:

Will you now be urgently reassessing the cases of children in BCP care to return them to birth families where possible?

This is a complex question to answer because children who are in care and adopted children are subject to different legal arrangements. I will answer the question by explaining the different nature of this arrangements and separately answer the question of urgent review.

I would like to assure you that BCP endeavours to support all children to remain with their birth families wherever that is safe and possible. If it is not in the best interests of the child for example where there is abuse or the child's needs cannot be met by their parents, we seek for alternative forms of care for the child our first consideration being wider family or friends.

46% of the children who entered care in BCP care last year returned home. A further 20% of the children who came into care in BCP last year went to live with wider family and friends caring for the child as a foster carer or under a Special Guardianship arrangement.

For children who cannot return home or to their wider families BCP has a duty to secure children a permanent and safe home to adulthood and beyond. Some children are fostered under a section 20 arrangement where birth parents share parental responsibility with the local authority, others are made subject to care order where the local authority holds parental responsibility. A care order is made by a judge who will carefully consider the ability of parents and wider family to care for the child prior to the making of the order.

Under both of these legal arrangements BCP is required to encourage contact with birth family wherever that is safe to do so. There is a statutory meeting every 6 month which considers the views of all those involved with the child including birth family the child and professionals. The meeting considers contact and whether the plan should be for the child to remain in foster care. It is possible for a child to return home on a care order and for the care order to be revoked where the parent has shown that they can provide a safe and secure home for the child.

An adoption order is different. It is made where it is believed by the council and the judge that parents are unable to make the changes necessary to safely care for the child within a reasonable timescale for that child. Unlike other orders an adoption order, is permanent. Although contact with birth parents is agreed as part of the adoption order support plan parental responsibility reverts to the adopters and cannot be reviewed.

Will BCP urgently reassess cases returning to birth family where possible

Other than where children are adopted the potential for that child to return home safely remains under review and is formally considered every 6 months. Most children return to their birth families quickly. As explained above 66% of children who came into care in 20/21 returned within the year to parents or wider family. In some instances this may take longer than a year. In 2020 to 2021, 25% of children left BCP care to return to their parents or birth families.

Do you agree that neurodivergent parents should receive any additional support do you feel that investing in such support would be better, especially for the children's long-term needs, than opting to keep funding long term care costs?

We seek to offer all parents additional support to keep children at home. BCP accepts that it is on a journey to ensure that all children with additional needs access high quality assessments and coordinated support. BCP children's services and their partners have been working on plans to develop the range of support that can be offered to families.

Where parents have additional needs such as neurodiversity, services access specialist advice and support from within adult and children's services and would support parents to access specialist services as appropriate.

The funding of long-term care costs

As previously stated, BCP would always prefer to support children to remain with their families but must also support those children who cannot remain at home.

Councillor Richard Burton

Chair, Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

38. Children's Services Capital Programme

The Interim Pupil Place Planning, Admissions and School Funding Manager, 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 set out the capital programme for Children's Services, including summarising the available funding and approved projects. It provided a summary of the status of projects which had been completed or were in progress, and of projects which had not yet been initiated. A review of inclusion practice in BCP schools and a revised special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) strategy was underway, led by the Director of Education. A programme of capital works to help deliver that strategy would be brought forward in the 2022 budget.

The Committee discussed the report and comments were made, including:

- In response to a query regarding the Longspee site and the delay of the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) and installation of solar panels, the Committee was advised there was delays due to planning and legal discussions regarding responsibilities and liabilities
- Some Committee Members requested to be able to visit the Longspee satellite site to see the work that had been undertaken **(Action)**
- A Committee Member was pleased regarding the rebuild of Hillbourne school which would have a positive impact on the local community.
- A Committee Member highlighted previous consideration of a new school site in Creekmoor which could be considered for a special school in the future if required
- In response to a query regarding the governance of hubs, the Committee was advised that the satellite schools were part of the special schools and not the host school. In practice it meant high levels of cooperation and communication between host school and satellite schools/hubs which provided good opportunities to be flexible for the students.
- In response to a query regarding whether any children would be negatively impacted by the pause at Somerford, the Committee was reassured by the Director of Education that children were currently at Winchelsea or had yet to be identified as needing specialist provision, however the Somerford satellite would enable provision to be provided in the Christchurch area, where there was currently no specialist provision..
- There were further discussions around the Somerford Project including the current due diligence work which was being completed, seeking advice on feasibility from construction professionals and property services to gain accurate costing information
- In response to a concern regarding the spending of Section 106 monies, the Committee was advised that any money received would need to be spent in accordance with the contract it was received under.
- The new SEND statement of action was discussed and it was noted that it would be available for the Committee to consider at its November meeting. **(Add to Forward Plan).**

- In response to a query regarding the Hillbourne rebuild, the Committee was reassured that the rebuild was on time and in budget and there were no concerns regarding the handover, budget and quality of work.

The Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Covid Resilience and Schools and Skills wanted to highlight the governance of the programme which started with the Children's Services Capital Programme Board, then followed a clear and transparent democratic process. It was also highlighted that the report was linked to the commissioning of the right SEND provision for the children of BCP. The Committee was also advised that there was no plans for a new school, however many satellite and inclusion in mainstream provisions were being considered as preferred alternatives.

The Chair summarised the discussions as follows:

- Ensbury park campus/Longspee site and delays with the MUGA and installation of solar panels
- A visit to be arranged for Committee Members to visit the Ensbury Park campus
- The Committee fully supported the programme and were pleased with the work being undertaken
- The possible site in Creekmoor for new SEND provision
- Long discussion surrounding the pause of the Somerford project.

RECOMMENDED that:

- (a) Cabinet note the report**
- (b) Cabinet approve the process for the development of a special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) strategy and an associated programme of capital works to be approved as part of the 2022-23 budget**
- (c) Cabinet approves the pausing of the project to create a satellite for Winchelsea School at Somerford Primary School, and agrees to deferring the opening of such a satellite to the school year 2022-23 pending the approval of the SEND strategy and associated capital programme.**

Voting: For - Unanimous

39. Children's Social Care Improvement Journey – progress update

The DfE Improvement Advisor for BCP and Interim Corporate Director, Children's Services 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 Committee received an overview report of progress at its meeting on 8 June 2021 and requested further updates in order to be satisfied that was progress being maintained.

The Committee discussed the report and comments were made, including:

- In response to a query regarding fixed term exclusions, the Committee was advised that the figures being discussed had been disrupted by Covid and need to be viewed against the increase in elective home education which meant the figures were disproportionate at this time
- The Chair was pleased regarding the Inquiry into inclusion and investigating the increase in home schooling and the reasons for that. The Committee was reassured that all children and families who had opted for home schooling were being supported and visited by an experienced officer.
- A Committee Member acknowledged and appreciated the amount of improvement work that had been undertaken to date.
- In response to a query regarding Mosaic IT system, the Committee was advised that the integration was being progressed at pace as part of the transformation programme.
- The Committee was advised that the Children Services teams were generally happy places with high levels of commitment and satisfaction however, there was still concerns and uncertainty surrounding the wider BCP organisation such as the Local Government Review and staff still waiting for a permanent structures.
- In response to a query regarding children at risk of sexual exploitation and the Committee was advised that the service was now better at identifying profiles which had led to the increase in reported figures
- In response to a query, the Committee was advised of the process which would be followed after an employee handed in their notice, which included immediate advertisement of the role and close management of the case allocation to ensure all work was covered. In connection to this, the Committee was reassured that any cases shown as unallocated on Mosaic were still be managed but could be a result of a gap between a Social Worker leaving and the case being reallocated to another worker on the system
- In response to a query regarding workforce stability and a link with house prices and job salaries, the Committee was advised that the housing stock and market was not a significant issue, it was more to do with good work life balance and professional development.
- In response to a query why staff would choose to remain as agency, the Committee was advised that some prefer it because they can earn more and leave quickly, some are converted to permanent employees and some were agency due to their standard of work.

The Chair summarised the discussions as follows:

- Unprecedented demand and Multi agency issues highlighted
- Fixed term and home schooling
- Improving Children's Social Care and Mosaic IT system
- Staffing issues and Culture of BCP
- Vacancies and stability of staff
- Children at risk of CSE.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee noted and scrutinised the report and that any points and suggestions be built into the next stage of the Children's Social Care improvement journey.

40. School Place Planning Strategy

The Interim Pupil Place Planning, Admissions and School Funding Manager, 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 School Place Planning Strategy was a non-statutory strategy intended to provide information about the forecast supply and demand for school places for the coming years, and to set out principles for organisational change. The intended audience included BCP elected members, schools and academies, the Department for Education, its agencies and the wider community. The strategy did not make proposals for organisational change, such as the opening of new schools, school closures, or change of admission numbers: it provided information to enable strategic planning.

The Committee discussed the report and comments were made, including:

- The Chair requested ward boundaries be included in the maps provided in the strategy (**Action**)
- In response to a query, the Committee was advised that forecasting pupil numbers was a complex task which included known numbers of children in the area, number of school places currently available, using formulas for new housing estates, discussions with developers and whether new school provision would be needed
- Schools in Merley were highlighted and it was noted that they were popular and full at primary and middle phases and that Officers were in discussions with developers about what can be done to address the issues
- An error was highlighted with on Page 16 regarding North West Poole which needed to be amended to read Broadstone and Merley, not Canford Heath. (**Action**)
- The age of transfer scheme was highlighted and it was noted that it was unusual to have a three tier system in one corner of the conurbation and that BCP had little control due to them being Academy Trusts.
- A Committee Member suggested it would be beneficial to provide data of the waves of population over a significant period of time such as 20-25 years

- In response to a query regarding promoting walking and cycling to school and place planning, the Committee was advised of the need to ensure the supply of attractive educational offers so that parents were happy with the local offer.
- The Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Covid Resilience and Schools and Skills referred to place planning being an art as much as a science with had many different levels which were beyond BCP's control. The priority to provide sustainable and safe routes to school to promote the habit of walking and talking was highlighted. The first part to this was ensuring schools places were available in the right location at the right time
- In response to a query regarding the percentage of pupils which attended grammar schools, the Committee was advised that this information could be provided (**Action**) and linked to that was the congestion around the grammar schools and that better transport needs to be investigated, the Corporate Director advised that the transport strategy could be shared at that time (**Action**).

The Chair summarised the discussions as follows:

- Ward boundaries
- 3 tier system in North West Poole
- Waves in population
- Transportation issues and sustainable transport
- Percentage of pupils going to grammar schools

RESOLVED that the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted and provided comments on the School Place Planning Strategy 2021-2024.

41. Portfolio Holder Update

The Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Covid Resilience and Schools and Skills thanked the Committee for its valuable contributions to the items considered and advised of some items that would be coming to Committee soon.

42. Information Only Items

There was no information only items to be circulated on this occasion.

43. Forward Plan

The Chair advised the Committee of the planned forward planning session and it was noted that details would be shared by the Clerk in due course.

44. Dates of Future Meetings

The dates of the future meetings were noted.

The meeting ended at 8:00pm.

CHAIR

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