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Minutes of the meeting of the CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on THURSDAY 15 JULY 2021 at 7.00 pm

**Present:** Councillor M Bradburn (Chair)  
Councillors Cryer-Whitehead, D Hopkins, McLean, Lancaster and B Nolan.

**Officers:** M Heath (Director of Children's Services), M Denny (Group Head: Education, Learning and Inclusion), M Fell (Team Manager: Children with Disabilities Team), C Markwell (Educational Psychology Assistant), C Marriott (Head of Delivery, SEN and Disability), R Mascarenhas (Youth Participation Worker) and A Melia (Overview & Scrutiny Officer).

**Apologies:** Apologies were received from Councillor Marlow (substituted by Councillor Lancaster), Councillor Rolfe (substituted by Councillor McLean), Councillor Baines, Councillor McQuillan and Councillor V Hopkins. Councillor K Bradburn and Councillor Raja gave apologies for absence and could not be recorded as present but joined the meeting remotely.

**Also Present:** Councillor Z Nolan (Cabinet member for Children and Families), M Bulmer (Milton Keynes Youth Cabinet), J Clarke (Chief Executive, Tove Learning Trust), H Hoskisson (Chief Executive Officer, Carers Bucks and Carers MK), I Oduko (Parent Governor Representative), S Piesse (Chief Executive, Oxford Diocesan Bucks Schools Trust) and T Poyner (Milton Keynes Youth Cabinet).

**CYP03 WELCOMES AND INTRODUCTION**

The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of the Committee and invited Councillors to introduce themselves, the ward they represent and their role within the Committee.

**CYP04 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

There were no disclosures of interest.

**CYP05**

**MINUTES**

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the meetings of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 10 February 2021 and 19 May 2021 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

**CYP06**

**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

None.

**CYP07**

**STANTONBURY INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL UPDATE REPORT**

**Witnesses: M Heath (Director of Children's Services), M Denny (Group Head, Education, Learning and Inclusion) and J Clarke (Chief Executive, Tove Learning Trust).**

The Group Head, Education, Learning and Inclusion, introduced the report and highlighted that Stantonbury International was one of the largest schools in Milton Keynes, but was not currently the school of local choice.

It was further noted that:

- Stantonbury was previously brokered to a multi-academy trust in an attempt to improve the school after it was given a second rating of "requires improvement" by Ofsted.
- The latest inspection took place in January 2020, with the report published in June 2020 because of delays related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The school was given an inadequate rating, with ineffective safeguarding.
- Following this, Stantonbury was brokered to the Tove Learning Trust, another multi-academy trust that the Group Head for Education, Learning and Inclusion suggested has strong relationships with other secondary schools in Milton Keynes.
- It was noted that Milton Keynes Council as the local authority was able to support Tove Learning Trust, despite academy status.

The Chief Executive, Tove Learning Trust, highlighted some of the salient points:

- It was noted that the Tove Learning Trust manages seven schools, with two in the West Midlands progressing from an inadequate to a good rating within three years. A third school progressed from inadequate to requires improvement.
- Whilst these schools have seen swift improvement, it was suggested that culture change was difficult to achieve in a short time frame. A behaviour policy has been developed to ensure that pupils have a safe environment in which to learn.

- The Chief Executive, Tove Learning Trust expressed confidence that the necessary improvements could be made to Stantonbury based on the Tove Learning Trust's track record with similar schools.

The Director of Children's Services stated that the desire was for Stantonbury to act not simply as a building, but as part of the wider community, of which children are a crucial component. It was also acknowledged that the re-brokering process took longer than intended, with the aim to now hit the ground running in September.

Members of the Committee commented as follows:

- Concerns were expressed that Stantonbury will require assistance from the local authority in future, although it was noted that this comment was not a reflection on multi-academy trusts.
- It was suggested that local authorities should be encouraged to put forward a case to take over failing schools.
- The Committee emphasised that reinvestment in the Stantonbury International school campus and its infrastructure would have a positive impact on the local community.
- Concerns were expressed that the handover date of 1 September would be too late to be impactful in the next academic year.
- Members of the committee queried how good teachers will be attracted to the school given its previous reputation and commented that one of the main concerns around Stantonbury in recent years was the lack of communication from the school.
- The Committee also wished to note their support for Tove Learning Trust in its attempts to improve Stantonbury International School and asked how the Council could help to facilitate these improvements.

In response to questions, the Committee heard:

- Information on the number of multi-academy trusts that applied to take over Stantonbury could not be provided as this information was not made available to Milton Keynes Council. Recommendations based on the available information were made to the Regional Schools Commissioner.
- Headteachers of secondary schools in MK work collaboratively to monitor the supply of school places and ensure stability. It was noted that the impact of limiting pupil numbers in Stantonbury would be jointly monitored by the school and Milton Keynes Council and The Chief Executive, Tove Learning Trust, reiterated the desire to work collaboratively.

- An agreement would be sought to cap number based on patterns of admission, to ensure that there was a place in a good school for all children within walking distance of home.
- It was highlighted that the year nine bracket for Stantonbury has 272 pupils, with 87 vacancies. The Group Head for Education, Learning and Inclusion advised that capping the number at 300 would allow the school to plan more effectively to provide a balanced education for students.
- It was advised that Tove Learning Trust had limited control over the transfer date due to technical issues with regards to buildings and contracts but would work with the Department for Education to make an impact at the earliest possible juncture.
- The Trust has engaged with the staff at Stantonbury. Further engagement would be considered, working within restrictions set by GDPR legislation.
- Work has started on making changes to the school and its facilities, within the scope permitted by the current multi-academy trust. Feedback from pupils has contributed to some of this work, such as the planned installation of more CCTV cameras in strategic locations around the campus.
- The Cabinet Member for Children and Families expressed a number of concerns but noted that some of the questions were answered during the course of the meeting. The capacity of Tove Learning Trust to take on another school was highlighted as a major query.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the relevant officers be requested to write to the Regional Schools Commissioner expressing dissatisfaction at the decision to not allow Tove Learning Trust to take over Stantonbury International School until September 1 2021.
- 2) That the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Planning Group consider scheduling a further update report on Stantonbury International School into the Committee work programme.
- 3) That relevant officers be requested to lobby local MP's to allow Milton Keynes Council, as the local authority, to take over failing schools in the area.

**CYP08**

**COVID-19 UPDATE**

**Witnesses: M Heath (Director of Children's Services).**

The Director of Children's Services introduced the item and advised that the data relates to the first quarter of 2021, and due to the nature

of the pandemic, it was agreed at previous meetings that a verbal update would be given to account for any changes to the data between the drafting of the report and the meeting itself.

Some of the key points were as follows:

- It was noted that there has been some dissonance between the national narrative of moving out of the pandemic compared to the challenges seen in Milton Keynes schools.
- The Director of Children's Services wished to commend school staff for their innovation and resilience in keeping schools open throughout the year.
- Since the last meeting of the Committee, a further inspection into youth offending services by HM Inspectorate of Probation has taken place.
- The Director of Children's Services expressed disappointment at the timing of the inspection in May 2021, as the youth offending services had recently undergone a management change, whilst the offices from which the services operated were closed due to Covid-19 concerns.
- It was emphasised that the inspection took place at distance, with a base in Manchester, which presented some difficulties around understanding local issues within Milton Keynes. The inspection letter is likely to be published in mid-August.
- The Director of Children's Services resolved, subject to the Committee's agreement, to provide a development plan arising from the inspection along with the full report to a future meeting.
- Children's Services has been focussed on the upcoming Summer of Play and how this can be used to support families whilst children are away from school.
- From a national perspective, a review into children's social care has been commissioned by the Department for Education due to concerns around the number of children going into care and the increase in the number of court proceedings.
- It was highlighted that Milton Keynes is below the national average for the concerns cited, but still has a role within the South East to feed into the review.

The Director of Children's Services subsequently provided an update on the report detailing the impact of Covid-19 on Children's Services key performance data:

- The Committee had previously requested reassurance of the quality of Children's Services, and how success was measured. It

was advised that a recent social care assurance visit from Ofsted found the thresholds to be robust.

- With regards to the level of demand within the service, it was noted that the full demand arising from the pandemic has not yet made its way through into Children's Services, evidenced by the increase in referrals to the multi-agency safeguarding hub.
- The level of response throughout the pandemic has remained consistent and the number of children considered to be at risk of harm in Milton Keynes was below both the national level and the level of statistical neighbours.
- The net figure of children within the care of Milton Keynes Council has remained stable. It was noted that in April 2020 there were 396 children in care, compared to 387 at the time of the report, with a peak of 405 December 2020. However, it was emphasised that the cohort of children in care has changed over this timeframe.

In response to questions, the Committee heard:

- The increased number of referrals to the Children and Family Practices Teams was attributed to challenges of demand in a growing service area, with the impact on staff cited as an example of a live challenge within the service.
- With the backing of councillors, a new family support team was created to provide additional resources to handle the growth in demand, and it was acknowledged that the caseloads for officers must remain at a manageable level.
- The Golden Triangle model arose from an Ofsted report in 2016. The importance of individual services sitting under a banner was stressed, along with the advantages of having a lead councillor responsible for key areas of challenge, which the Golden Triangle model provides.
- It was also emphasised that the main purpose of Children's Services is to keep families together where possible and Milton Keynes Council has promoted early intervention before problems escalate.
- There are a number of challenges relevant to children and young people that are outside of Children's Services direct responsibility, such as housing. Members of the team have worked to develop relationships with the relevant Cabinet member in important areas.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the Director of Children’s Services be requested to provide a report on the upcoming YOT inspection at the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on 1 December 2021.
- 2) That training for mental health and wellbeing be provided by schools to parents and governors.
- 3) That the Director of Children’s Services be requested to look at issues regarding the wellbeing of staff who deliver care on behalf of Milton Keynes Council.

**CYP09**

**CHILD POVERTY**

**Witnesses: M Heath (Director of Children’s Services), M Fell (Team Manager, Children with Disabilities Team), H Hoskisson (CEO, Carers Bucks and Carers MK), C Markwell (Educational Psychology Assistant) and C Marriott (Head of Delivery, SEN and Disability).**

The Head of Delivery, SEN and Disability, introduced the report and emphasised that the long-term impact of Covid-19 on children with special educational needs has yet to fully be seen within Council services. The other witnesses also spoke on the presentation and highlighted some of the salient points as follows:

- It was noted that the wider data indicates a twofold correlation between poverty and special educational needs and disability (SEND). It suggests Children living in poverty at a young age are likely to be identified as having SEND in later life, whilst those with SEND are also more likely to move into poverty.
- The Committee’s attention was drawn to some of the factors that have been identified locally as a possible cause for leading families with a child who has SEND to poverty. These included: sudden changes in circumstance, the needs of a child escalating, and shielding during the Covid-19 pandemic as a result of a young person’s vulnerability.
- After analysing national prevalence rates for SEND and figures from the Spring 2021 census in MK, it was concluded that a significant number of families in Milton Keynes are at risk of poverty, with a knock-on effect for children with special educational needs.
- The Children with Disabilities Team had sixteen members within the service and the number of contacts had increased from 387 in 2018/19 to 503 in 2020/21.

- The corresponding data for 2021/22 was not fully available at the time of the Committee meeting, but there had been sixteen referrals throughout June and July, which represented a continuation of the steady increase seen in recent months.
- The Chief Executive Officer, Carers Bucks and Carer MK noted that the young carers referenced during the presentation are people under the age of 18 who care for an adult or family member in the UK. The reasons that care is provided are varied.
- As organisations, Carers Bucks and Carers MK have created a Young Adult Carers Project designed to support young carers between 16-25 in their transition to adulthood.
- It was highlighted that the cycle of poverty remains a key issue, with young carers often having grown up in homes that face multiple aspects of disadvantage including disability, poor mental wellbeing and living in deprived areas.
- In addition to the aforementioned issues, local areas of concern have been identified within Milton Keynes, such as the lack of access to transport and the adequate IT facilities.

In response to questions, the Committee heard:

- Whilst the average age at which dyslexia is diagnosed is around seven years old, the statistics in the report start at nine months due to the findings of a longitudinal study which suggested a link between poverty at nine months of age and a subsequent increase in the prevalence of SEND, such as dyslexia.
- A SEND support line has opened to provide support for both residents and schools to deal with issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. This service has continued to run after the lockdown period.
- In response to comments from the Committee, it was advised that the impact of caring circumstances be considered more widely to fully incorporate those who may be affected.

Members of the Committee commented as follows:

- Concerns were expressed over the lack of engagement with young carers, with a personal example of limited contact with the local authority or its partner organisations since 2019. As a result, the Committee queried what the Milton Keynes Council strategy is towards supporting young carers.
- It was suggested that because of the importance of the issues and information within the presentation, it be made available to all councillors.

- Members of the Committee indicated a desire to establish a “toy bank” and community larder, either through the Parents and Carers Alliance MK or officers of the Council, to provide support for families in need.
- A voucher scheme was proposed to allow young carers identified as being in need of greater access to adequate IT equipment and transport.
- Young carers who may have made their circumstances aware to Milton Keynes Council were encouraged to come forward and utilise the support available.
- It was suggested that the Champions Model, brought in to assist children in care, be considered for extension to incorporate young carers.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the Cabinet member for Tackling Inequalities and Child Poverty be requested to consider working with the CEO for Carers Bucks and Carers MK on providing more community larders and toy banks for young people.
- 2) That the Cabinet member for Children and Families be recommended to consider establishing a Champions Model for young carers, similar to the existing Champions Model for those leaving care.
- 3) That the Cabinet member for Children and Families be requested to look at means of alleviating transport and ICT issues for young carers accessing education.
- 4) That the presentation given at the meeting be made available to all councillors in order to raise awareness of the key issues.

## **CYP10**

### **COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22**

The Chair drew attention to the Committee Work Programme for 2021/22 and advised that if members of the Committee have any suggestions for items for scrutiny which are within the Committee’s remit during 2021/22, they be fed into the Committee’s Planning Group.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the draft 2021/22 Work Programme be received and noted.
- 2) That if members of the Committee have any suggestions for items for scrutiny which are within the Committee’s remit during 2021/22, they be fed into the Committee’s Planning Group.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 21.33 PM

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