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Minutes of the meeting of the CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on WEDNESDAY 1 DECEMBER 2021 at 19:00.

- Present:** Councillor M Bradburn (Chair)
Councillors Cryer-Whitehead, D Hopkins, Marlow, B Nolan and Rolfe.
- Officers:** M Heath (Director of Children's Services), M Denny (Group Head - Education, Learning and Inclusion), S Sims (Head of Service - Education Sufficiency, Access and Attendance), L Bartlett (Improvement Partner – Children and Families), A Talbot (Improvement Partner – Children and Families), R Mascarenhas (Youth Participation Worker) and A Melia (Overview & Scrutiny Officer).
- Apologies:** Councillor Baines, Councillor Brown, Councillor V Hopkins and Councillor McQuillan. Councillor K Bradburn and Councillor Raja gave apologies for non-attendance but joined the meeting remotely in order to contribute.
- Also Present:** L Di Mauro (Milton Keynes Youth Cabinet) and I Oduko (Parent Governor Representative).

CYP20 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillor Marlow advised for transparency that she is Vice-Chair of the governing body for The Redway School. Councillor K Bradburn advised for transparency that she is employed as an Exams Manager within a school and directly deals with assessment data as part of this role. Councillor Raja advised for transparency that she is a trust member of 5 Dimensions Trust, which oversees Shenley Brook End School and The Hazeley Academy. Councillor D Hopkins advised for transparency that he is Chair of Governors for St.Mary's Primary School and Vice-Chair of Governors for New Chapter Primary School

CYP21 MINUTES

RESOLVED - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 9 September 2021 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

CYP22 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

None.

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

The Director of Children's Services introduced the report and provided a verbal update on the impact of Covid-19. The salient points included:

- It was emphasised that, whilst there have been suggestions that society has entered a "post-Covid" era, over the previous months Children's Services have continued to operate on the basis that Covid-19 represented a significant challenge.
- Further guidance had been provided to secondary schools over the wearing of masks in indoor settings, in line with national and local guidelines.
- It was noted that further organisation was required to properly implement testing regimes within schools.
- The Committee were advised that since the last meeting, an Ofsted ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) Inspection had taken place, with the report due to be released in December.
- It was suggested that some of the challenges arising from Covid-19 may not have been given adequate consideration during the report.
- The safeguarding hub was considered robust and responsive. It was noted that if the demand rises, capacity challenges were planned to be brought forward.
- The Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme had continued since the last meeting and there had been continued dialogue with local schools over the possibility of introducing children to formal education after the Christmas break.
- The Director of Children's Services emphasised that the officers involved in this project had prioritised making accurate decisions rather than rushed ones.
- It was recommended that the Presentation containing the Summer of Play data be circulated to the Committee.
- Attention was drawn to statistics regarding the number of unaccompanied asylum seeker children that had been dispersed across the country. It was highlighted that Local Authorities were not mandated by the Secretary of State to take on such children, with accommodation challenges having been made apparent.

- Milton Keynes Council were heavily involved in South East Children's Services, but it was unclear how many of these children the Council would be required to take on.

Members of the Committee made comment and heard:

- The Committee wished to place on record their thanks to all members of staff in Children's Services and schools across Milton Keynes for their efforts throughout the pandemic.
- It was advised that during the ILACS inspection, Ofsted had indicated that the Council's recording of decisions was too concise.
- In response, the Director of Children's services suggested that social work in the community had been prioritised over additional paperwork, which had not been given adequate consideration during the inspection. Full judgement was reserved until publication of the report in mid-December 2021.
- The Committee heard that, where there were issues of risk with regards to Statutory Children's Safeguarding, all expectations were met.
- The Director of Children's Services confirmed that, amongst the unaccompanied asylum seeker children who require schooling, 49 were of primary school age and 27 were of secondary school age.
- It was further noted that some would require post-16 education, and others were eligible for pre-school and nurseries.
- It was confirmed that SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) requirements had been taken into consideration when calculating the need for school places amongst these children.
- Accommodation was an important consideration because of the variable number of unaccompanied asylum seeker children within the care of Milton Keynes Council.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the presentation containing the Summer of Play data be circulated to all Members of the Committee.
- 2) That the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee Planning Group be recommended to consider scheduling an item on the ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) Report, due for publication by Ofsted in December 2021, for the next Committee meeting in February 2022.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT UPDATE

Witnesses: M Denny (Group Head - Education, Learning and Inclusion), L Bartlett (Improvement Partner – Children and Families) and A Talbot (Improvement Partner – Children and Families).

The Group Head – Education, Learning and Inclusion, introduced the item and advised that the report was produced in the context of Covid-19, whereby two years had passed without formal assessment or exams. Two Strategic Leads for School Improvement had been appointed to monitor the overall situation – L Bartlett and A Talbot.

The Strategic Leads for School Improvement added that attainment information was unavailable for 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic but advised that exams were expected to take place in 2022.

Members of the Committee commented as follows:

- In response to questions it was advised that the annual evaluations planned for completion before the end of 2022 remained on track, although some evaluations were done through an online medium.
- The Committee drew attention to the Council’s ambition of having all schools rated as “Good” or better by Ofsted by 2024. It was emphasised that this ambition remained a core tenet of all work undertaken by officers in assessing schools within Milton Keynes.
- The 2024 target could not be brought forward as the Ofsted schedule had been disrupted by Covid-19 and delayed by up to eighteen months. However, it was emphasised that the possible lack of inspection did not indicate a lack of quality education.
- In response to questions about the geographic quadrants listed in the report, it was advised that each quadrant had met twice, with collaboration between schools cited as a key feature to help produce solutions and identify areas of need.
- The purpose of designing these quadrants was engagement and to receive constructive feedback from schools.
- The Committee reaffirmed that Covid-19 should not prevent children in Milton Keynes from receiving a quality education.
- In response, the Strategic Leads for School Improvement advised that the five schools yet to be evaluated had worked closely with officers and received full support throughout the pandemic.

- There were various reasons for the non-completion of these evaluations and the schools in question had now been prioritised for assessment.
- Data for SEND pupils was not available. However, pupils with EHC plans had been in contact with SENCO'S during the pandemic and assessment had continued to ensure that the needs of individual students were met.
- It was advised that schools are required to publish information regarding recovery premiums as part of the Pupil Premium Report. Headteachers have been asked to discuss how funding from the first national lockdown was utilised.
- The Committee advised that, alongside schools and headteachers, representatives of the Milton Keynes Youth Cabinet should be contacted for their opinion on how schools in Milton Keynes can be elevated to "Good" or better status by 2024.

RESOLVED –

That the Strategic Leads for Schools Improvement be requested to meet with members of the Milton Keynes Youth Cabinet and discuss their priorities in order to help realise the ambition of having all schools rated "Good" or better by 2024.

CYP25

PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING

Witnesses: M Denny (Group Head - Education, Learning and Inclusion) and S Sims (Head of Service - Education Sufficiency, Access and Attendance).

The Group Head – Education, Learning and Inclusion introduced the report and highlighted the salient points:

- Within the secondary school sector, there was a group known as Milton Keynes Secondary Heads, which had met monthly to discuss issues of school improvement.
- From this group, a sub-group was formed: Milton Keynes Secondary Heads Secondary Place Planning Group, which sought to take mutual responsibility for school places in this sector within Milton Keynes.
- It was advised that school place data for secondary schools was more easily obtainable in advance than similar data for primary schools, which had allowed the system to respond to challenges.
- The existing secondary school system had been utilised to expand schools in areas where additional school places were

not required for the longer-term, with contraction of places planned as necessary.

- Attention was drawn to statistics in the report which highlighted the increased birth rate in 2007 in existing areas of Milton Keynes.
- In response to this, an expansion programme was put in place to provide high quality school places for local children. Temporary solutions were not considered, which has resulted in extra complexities for contracting the system as the birth rate has reduced in line with national trends.

The Head of Service – Education Sufficiency, Access and Attendance added:

- There are important variables that have affected the ability to project future demand for primary schools.
- Milton Keynes Council as the Local Authority was the admissions authority for approximately half the schools in Milton Keynes which has necessitated a partnership-based approach.
- The rise and subsequent contraction of demand in established areas had coincided with increased development and significant growth areas across the Borough.
- The Committee heard that 350 places in the reception year group had been removed, with over 1000 places removed from year groups across the system.

The Director of Children’s Services commented on the number of complexities and challenges in projecting school place demand, such as the impact on school budgeting that would result from a significant number of empty school places.

Members of the Committee asked questions and heard as follows:

- There were several challenges in addressing this issue, such as the impact on school budgeting that has resulted from a significant number of empty school places.
- In response to a question referencing the previous amalgamation of schools in West Bletchley, it was suggested that merging schools was not considered the only solution. Infant and Junior schools were considered more vulnerable to having unoccupied spaces as they were smaller institutions, but flexibility in the system remained key.
- Concerns were raised that some schools within Milton Keynes suffered from historical poor reputations, which had resulted

in some prospective students rejecting available school places in favour of other schools.

- As such, Members of the Committee commented that it was the responsibility of Councillors and Milton Keynes Council as the Local Authority to help promote the quality of local primary schools, with particular reference to the ambition of all schools achieving a “Good” or better Ofsted rating by 2024.
- The Committee heard that, whilst some schools in Milton Keynes were at risk of losing places, the teachers within these schools would be retained within the system.
- The Committee raised concerns that the issue of school place planning had been considered in isolation.
- Areas of expansion and increased development had necessitated building additional schools, but concerns were raised that the location of new institutions had not been adequately discussed with Education and Children’s Services to avoid an imbalance in the number of pupils.
- The responsibility of Councillors, alongside other directorates and Parish and Town Councils, to help increase the take up of places in some schools within Milton Keynes was reiterated.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That other directorates within the Council, such as Planning and Environment and Property, be recommended to work with Children’s Services to help ascertain the most appropriate locations for schools built in new developments.
- 2) That Councillors and Milton Keynes Council as the Local Authority be recommended to promote the quality of local primary schools within Milton Keynes to address the surplus of places in some institutions that may suffer from low prestige in the local community.

CYP26

DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

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

The Committee reiterated their desire for the ILACS Report discussed during the Covid-19 and Children’s Services Update to be considered for scheduling at the next meeting in February 2022.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the Draft 2021/22 Work Programme be received and noted.
- 2) That the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee Planning Group be recommended to consider scheduling an item on the ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) Report, due for publication by Ofsted in December 2021, for the next Committee meeting in February 2022.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 20:57PM

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