

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 6th February, 2020.

Present:- Councillors Basra (Chair), Kelly (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Begum, N Holledge, Qaseem, Sadiq, A Sandhu and Sarfraz (until 7.51pm)

Apologies for Absence:- Paul Kassapian and Fifi El Sayed

PART 1

29. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Basra declared that she was a Director of First Impressions Consultants Ltd, which involved working with a number of organisations in the education sector. There were no conflicts with any matters on the agenda and she therefore stayed in the Chamber and participated in the meeting.

Councillor Kelly declared that he worked at Lynch Hill School Primary Academy. There were no conflicts with any matters on the agenda and he therefore stayed in the Chamber and participated in the meeting.

30. Minutes of the Meeting held on 5th December 2019

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 5th December 2019 be approved as a correct record.

31. Member Questions

No Member questions had been received.

32. Briefing on the Scope - 'Children Missing Education'

The Interim Service Lead for Inclusion introduced a report on children missing education, including the definition of the term, links to the risk of exclusion and the actions being taken to improve the monitoring and support to children.

The term children missing education (CME) was defined as children of compulsory school age, 5 to 16 years old, who were not registered pupils at a school and were not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school. CME were at a significant risk of underachieving; being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation; and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) later in life. Local authorities had a statutory obligation to establish the identities of CME. The Panel noted the wide variety of situations in which a child could be considered CME including those permanently excluded not provided with education within 6 days, children removed from a school register without informing the Council, unauthorised absences or home education and children moving into the area without a school place.

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The Panel was informed that the Council had a range of measures in place to monitor the whereabouts of children at risk of becoming CME. The Attendance Team had key role to play and they operated a pupil tracking system that was published weekly and included children missing education at risk of CME and referrals from agencies such as schools, social care and Thames Valley Police. The Officer explained the links to safeguarding and the position regarding fixed term and permanent exclusions from school.

Slough had a mobile population and the number of children being tracked and number of CME varied considerably throughout the year. A significant number of referrals were made in September at the start of each school year due to the number of children who had left the borough or moved abroad during the summer holidays. Most referrals were closed within a month and were not formally classified as CME. There was 1,412 referrals in 2018/19 of which 118 (8%) were CME. Slough's overall performance was better than the national average. The Panel considered future developments which included the work being undertaken to further strengthen inter-agency working and a review of the Fair Access Protocol.

The Panel raised a number of issues during a wide ranging discussion which are summarised as follows:

- Members asked for further detail about the pre-emptive actions the Council was taking to reduce the risk of CME. The Officer provided assurance that this was a core part of the department's role and several examples were given of the types of proactive steps that would be undertaken given the particular circumstances of the child. These included data collection to identify trends and children at risk and working with schools to try to contact families quickly after any absence to try to intervene early where appropriate.
- The requirements for monitoring children being home schooled was raised. There was tight monitoring in place for children were taken out of school to be home schooled, however, parents who chose to home educate from the start of education did not have to inform the local authority and monitoring was difficult with no legal obligation for parents to accept visits from the education department.
- Concern was raised about the perception that exclusions were sometimes used by schools to remove challenging children from the roll. Officers gave assurance that there were strong legal protections for children in this regard and the local authority was always informed by the school. The number of permanent exclusions in Slough was low. Littledown School and Haybrook College offered a range of provision to ensure all children remained in education or were able to return to mainstream education. The exclusion of SEN pupils was discussed and it was noted that no children with a EHCP should be excluded.

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- Members asked for further data about the reasons for CME by the categories set out in paragraph 5.2 of the report. It was noted that the data was constantly changing and the data was not collected in a way that put each child in one of the categories set out in the report. However, Officers agreed to provide any further data that could be provided to help the Panel better understand the numbers of CME by reason.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Panel noted the report.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

33. Prevention of Youth Offending / Re-Offending

The Head of Service of Slough Youth Offending Team introduced a report that updated on developments within the YOT and wider youth justice arena since the last report to the Panel in October 2018. The report set out the performance, challenges and successes during this period.

YOT reported its performance locally to the YOT Management Board and also submitted reports on key indicators for comparison with sub-regional, regional and national areas. A summary of performance was set out in Table 3 in the Appendix to the report and it was noted that there had been a slight reduction in the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system aged 10-17 from 58 to 57. This figure was better than the local target of 62 entrants in 2018/19. The number of custody offences had fallen by half from the previous year. Slough's figure was higher than the regional average but below national trends. Re-offending had also fallen to 12.9% which was significantly better than the local target of 25.8% or less for 2018/19. The Youth Justice Board had confirmed that the Youth Justice Plan submitted in August 2019 complied with the relevant requirements and the work being done in Slough was praised in a number of areas.

(Councillor Sarfraz left the meeting)

The main challenges were summarised and included the involvement of young people in the movement of drugs and serious youth violence. The YOT was working closely with partners including the Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit and the Serious Youth Violence Task Force. Table 1 to the report set out the top 10 offences in the year to June 2019 and 23% of such offences were violence against the person. The Panel discussed the actions being taken to prevent violent crime and were assured that it was a top priority. Members highlighted the importance of ensuring there was effective support for the wider family as this was often key to changing patterns of behaviour. The Officer commented that the support would vary depending on the circumstances in each case and sometimes the willingness of families to accept support.

In terms of the offenders themselves, YOT worked with youth services and others to try to get the right support to individuals which could include

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substance misuse and mental health issues. One way to improve life chances was through employment and training opportunities. A Member asked whether the Council's apprenticeship programme specifically provided opportunities for youth offenders. It was agreed to provide further information on this issue.

At the conclusion of the discussion the report was noted.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

34. Forward Work Programme 2019/20

Members reviewed the Panel's work programme for the remainder of the 2019/20 municipal year.

The following amendments and additions were agreed:

- SCST to be asked to bring their Annual Report to the meeting on 11 March meeting.
- Unprogrammed item on School Places Strategy/Admission Service to be scheduled for 15 April 2020.
- Information report to be added to the meeting on 11th March on Early Years Children's Centres.
- Child poverty report scheduled for 11th March to cover statistics/data on the position in Slough; the scale of the problem in the town; the contributory factors; and the actions being taken.
- Possible visit to be arranged to YES Consortium.

Resolved – That the work programme be agreed, subject to the amendments above.

35. Members Attendance Record 2019/20

Resolved – That the Members' Attendance Record be noted.

36. Date of Next Meeting - 11th March 2020

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 11th March 2020.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.27 pm)