

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Wednesday, 17th April, 2019.

Present:- Councillors Sharif (Chair), Brooker, N Holledge, Matloob, Minhas, D Parmar, A Sandhu and Strutton

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Kelly

PART 1

54. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Brooker, Parmar and Strutton declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 7 as they were members of the Joint Parenting Panel.

Councillor Brooker declared a non-pecuniary interest in all agenda items in that he was a governor of Church Mead and Ryvers Schools.

55. Minutes of the Meeting held on 13th March 2019

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2019 be approved as a correct record.

56. Action progress report

Resolved: That details of the Action Progress report be noted.

57. Member Questions

Three Member questions had been received.

Resolved: That the written responses be noted

58. Slough Children's Services Trust Achievements Report 2017-19

Members received a report and presentation which covered an 18 month period to 31 March 2019 which allowed for the incorporation of the Ofsted inspection at the start of 2019 under its new framework and also taking into account leadership changes at the Trust during the spring and autumn of 2018. The Board Chair stated that the inspection results confirmed the significant progress made and that work arising from the inspection had already commenced.

Following the presentation by the Chief Executive, Slough Children's Services Trust, Members asked questions and sought clarification on a number of issues which were duly responded to including:

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- during the reporting period Children Looked After leaving care had received a good range of appropriate provision from a supporting team. None had been housed in bed and breakfast accommodation;
- it was a 6 year contract with a break clause in October 2019 and a review was a normal requirement of such a contract;
- the recruitment of permanent social workers was a national problem, particularly in the south east. There had been an incremental change in front line staff from agency to permanent. The projection was positive and had been assisted by the good Ofsted report, a new social work academy, apprenticeship scheme, a step up programme for graduates, scheme for employees with foundation qualification and in house training. Of the 340 staff employed by the trust in March 2019 approximately 280 were permanent members of staff;
- the ratio of social workers to children varied according to complexity but in general was a favourable average of one social worker to 16-19 children;
- those children identified as having EEC origin were being assisted regarding registration of the right to remain in connection with Brexit. Processes to ensure the right to remain for unaccompanied refugee children from outside the EEC were followed as appropriate. The requirement was to support CLA until they became 25 years of age;
- an annual survey was undertaken to seek the views of children in care and updates were sought from the independent reviewing officers. The officers were confident that their needs were being met as appropriate and that the children were never promised something that could not be delivered or was not appropriate. A Member suggested that the statement from Slough's Children in Care Council in the Corporate Parenting Strategy should include the words 'to continue to' in its expectations.

The Chair reported that the visit by Members to the Trust had been positive.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

59. School Attendance

The Panel received a report which provided up to date information about school attendance in Slough schools.

The Service Lead Inclusion introduced the report and informed Members of an amendment to report in that 992 fines were issued in 2013/14 and not 481 which referred to 2012/13.

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The Attendance Team Manager highlighted that school absence was monitored using indicators for overall absence and persistent absence. Performance was above the national average for primary and special schools but below across secondary schools. There was an increase in the number of fines year on year. From September 2013 a regulations amendment clarified that term time leave could only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

In response to questions regarding strategies to improve unauthorised absence, it was noted that:

- the primary focus was on enforcement with the majority of schools working in partnership with the Council. Each school had a named officer and every half term the statistics were reviewed. The schools' internal response process is to make contact on the first day of absence and then follow up as appropriate;
- the target was that overall persistent rates, authorised and non-authorised absence, were in line with the national average;
- whilst the £60 fine could not be considered a deterrent when compared with the saving for a holiday during term, the fine for unauthorised absence was set by the Department of Education. It was noted that regular school assemblies which showed the correlation between results and attendance had an impact and sent a message regarding good attendance;
- the large special school in Slough which included those with very complex needs was not statistically comparable to special schools in general;
- liaison with public health officers would be required to ascertain whether there was a correlation between Slough's air pollution and the incidence of tooth decay and sickness absence. If such a link was found it could be seen if there was anything strategic that could be done;
- schools had a duty to inform the Local Authority if a child was removed from school to enable checks to be done. It should be noted that Slough was an area of high mobility and the vast majority of children taken off register was due to legitimate reasons. Ofsted were happy with the processes undertaken by Slough. A child could lose a place due to unauthorised absence when family moved and the child could not be located;
- the attendance team did not maintain a breakdown of absence by ethnicity and the officers would check whether the schools recorded such information. Each school would take into account their communities, for example religious observance, and any particular issues presented at the school;

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- wilful absence could be prosecuted but there could be a range of reasons why families required support to try and address issues that prevented school attendance;
- elective home education was not required to follow the national curriculum but a visit was made to ascertain the education provided.

A Member referred to the information that in Slough in 2017/18, 1083 pupils took between 5 and 9 days unauthorised holiday, and 501 pupils took 10 or more days of unauthorised holiday and enquired what was the average and longest absence of those taking 10 or more days. It was agreed that this information would be made available to the Panel.

Resolved: That

1. the information be circulated to the Panel on the average and longest absence of those pupils who had ten or more unauthorised absences
2. the report be noted

60. Joint Parenting Panel Quarterly Update

The Panel received an update on the work of the Joint Parenting Panel since the last report to the Panel on 6 December 2018.

The Director of Children, Learning and Skills Services introduced the report, highlighting: the business conducted at the January meeting; the Corporate Parenting Strategy had been strongly praised by Ofsted; and that the primary CLA had performed better than primary schools overall for good outcomes. The next meeting was due to be held the following week.

In response to a question from a Member regarding the expected year 11 performance, it was noted that every effort was made to give as much support as possible for them to do as well as they possibly could in order to maximise their outcomes. Further details on the current year 11 cohort would be given in the annual report from the Virtual School Head Teacher.

A Member referred to the areas for development given in the Corporate Parenting Strategy and was informed that these resulted from the 2015 Ofsted report and were not a recommendation in the recent Ofsted inspection.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

61. Attendance Record

Resolved: That the Members Attendance Record for 2018/19 be noted.

62. Date of Next Meeting - 16th July 2019

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16 July 2019

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.35 pm)