

People Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 31st March, 2022.

Present:- Councillors Qaseem (Chair), Kelly (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Basra, Begum and Brooker

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Hulme and Gahir

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Matloob, Mohammad and Sandhu

PART 1

32. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Brooker declared that he was a governor at St Mary's CE Primary School.

Councillor Kelly declared that he worked for the Slough and East Berkshire CofE Multi Academy Trust (SEBMAT).

Councillors Brooker and Kelly remained and participated in the meeting.

33. Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 January 2022

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2022 be approved as a correct record.

34. Member Questions

None received

35. SEND Written Statement of Action

The Panel received a report and a presentation on the SEND Written Statement of Action (WSOA) that the Local Authority (LA) and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) had filled with Ofsted on 18 February 2022, in response to the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) local area inspection.

The Cabinet member for Children's Services, Lifelong Learning & Skills spoke about the item and thanked officers and all those that had been involved in submitting the response, following the inspection of SEND services in Slough. A WSOA was required in order to ensure that the council was meeting the SEND responsibility for children in accordance with the Children and Families Act 2014. The Cabinet member stated that the LA, CCG and Slough Children First (SCF) would work jointly to address highlighted areas for development.

The Associate Director, Education, and Inclusion (ADE&I) responded to Members' questions and comments as set out below.

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A member asked whether the proposed completion target dates were likely to be met given the current resources available. The ADE&I advised that it may not be possible to meet some targets due to limited resources, but internal processes were currently being reviewed to assess available resources to improvements were possible.

(18.43 – Cllr Begum joined the meeting)

A member asked whether the focus area of expanding the workforce to increase clinical capacity for new assessment target date of March 2023, had been set as a worst case scenario. It was explained that this target was specific to the CCG, but efforts were being made to put additional resources to deal with the issue, given that this was a priority action point.

In response to the query as to whether the target to put the SEND team structure in place by April 2022 would be met. The ADE&I explained that a business case had been submitted and once the outcome had been confirmed, the Panel would be provided with an update.

A member highlighted that most of the priorities were set out as being 'in progress' and queried the likelihood of the actions being achieved on time, given the need for financial requirements. It was noted that the document was strategic and working groups would be created to achieve the completion date from the actions outlined. Members were reassured that processes had been put in place to drive forward the actions but were urged to be mindful that progress would be measured due to the issue of resources. Despite the slow progress, it was anticipated that needed resources would speed things up.

A member asked what had been put in place to improve the Council's SEND duties given the high number of primary school pupils with SEND or Educational Health Care Plans (EHCP). The ADE&I advised that the prevent programme was now in place to address the weakness of not having had an early intervention programme in the past. Plans were now in place to identify children at an earlier stage and the Panel would be provided with an update in due course. Members were urged to be mindful that expenditure in this area was highly overspent and this needed to be reduced.

In response to a query raised about the tracking of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and concern about schools not using the grant appropriately; it was explained that the inspection had highlighted this as an area of concern and although training had been set up, there were still difficulties in tracking currently.

A member asked about the level of staff turnover, as there had been issues with schools not being able to contact officers in the SEND team. The ADE&I explained that there were currently 2.8 equivalent full time staff out of 7 in the team. Schools had been contacted to explain the issue of high turnover of interim officers who tended to support approximately 200-250 children and subsequently resulted in the issue of a smooth handover. Members were reassured that improvements were imminent as the department was in the

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process of appointing new staff and plans had been put in place to mitigate the issues arising from interim staff leaving.

A member asked about the proposal for cultural change. It was explained that this would begin with setting standards and expectation for services, documenting various roles in order to be clear and transparent. Specific actions and Key performance indicators (KPI) would also be developed within the next four weeks

In response to a question about an area of concern in respect of children in care, it was explained that the Council was taking a multi-agency approach and although this was a high preference group, the priority was to focus on the plan to ensure that children received their entitlement for speech and language therapy.

A member asked what actions would be taken to work with schools to ensure a full understanding of the SEND code of practice and statutory responsibilities. The ADE&I advised that work would be undertaken with schools to impart an understanding of a holistic approach, setting out their responsibilities and providing guidance on funding restrictions. It was explained that challenges were being overcome but the critical issue was about how the needs of children were being met. Schools and SENCOs were being invited to SEND panel meetings, which contributed to making the process transparent and thus promoting an understanding and acceptance of change.

A member asked about feedback on improved services for hard to reach parents. It was explained that the Council was aware of every parent that had a child with an EHCP. There had been a review of the different languages with translations to ensure an inclusive service that took the views of parents on board. No system had been in place in the past to enable challenge, but the new way would provide better insight.

A member asked how teachers would be supported in providing action plans from schools in relation to review and facilitate school-to-school support on effective practice in SEND and inclusion support delivery. The ADE&I advised that this was facilitated by schools being able to share practices and school effectiveness strategy (academies were not required to but they also participated). There had also been an agreement with headteachers to include SEND specific questions and they would provide evidence of what and how they were doing.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Gahir asked a number of questions which included clarification on the 7 areas identified for improvement, all of which were noted as being 'on track'. Cllr Gahir suggested that milestones would need to be reviewed as the WSOA was filed in February with the outcome of many actions set out as being 'in progress' and required tasks to be undertaken and reported back on. Therefore, he did not believe that it was correct to state that all actions were 'on track'. Cllr Gahir also questioned how frequently reviews would be undertaken. Members were informed that the

focus was on progress rather than on cultural change, which could only be ascertained from receiving feedback. Inbuilt system of communication and survey would provide required feedback.

Resolved - That the SEND Written Statement of Action report be noted.

36. Re-procurement of Adult Social Care Domiciliary Care Contracts

The Group Manager, Purchasing (GMP) presented a report and presentation on the Re-procurement of Adult Social Care Domiciliary. The report sought comments and consideration of the model agreed at Cabinet. The GMP responded to Members' questions and comments as set out below.

The Panel discussed and raised a number of questions.

A member asked whether the services from the same number of providers would be continued in the future. The GMP explained that this would depend on the amount of tender and capacity and there the number may increase as there was no restriction to the number of suppliers. Members were advised that selection was made only on suitable suppliers for requirements.

In response to a question about assessment process and criteria used to assess new entrants, Members were advised that an inspection was undertaken to ensure information given was accurate and was being put in practice. Work was also done with providers to improve standards before their services were used. The Quality Assurance team also reviewed providers to ensure and improve quality.

A member asked about the shortage of male domiciliary carers and the number of apprenticeships offered. Members were advised that a number of well-established providers had apprenticeship schemes, whilst the startup providers did not. There was also a high turnover for male care workers as they tended to work for a short while and moved on to other occupations. The GMP acknowledged that there was a need to ensure stability of male carers and advised that a workforce group had been created across East Berkshire to look at enhancing carers profession. It was also noted that the question of how providers meet the diversity of the community and ensuring a match, as well as the need to change the way in which the profession was viewed had been raised.

A member asked how key performance indicators (KPI) would be monitored. It was noted that these would be done through KPI workbook and may include matching diversity needs and looking at the number of people they had not been able to provide for. Additionally, there was a possibility of the link between rate and quality being reviewed, but such link had not yet been observed.

A member asked whether funding would be spent by 31 March 2022 financial deadline and whether unspent money could be clawed back. The GMP

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explained that the exact figure would need to be obtained and reported back to the Panel.

Resolved – That the report Re-procurement of Adult Social Care Domiciliary be noted.

37. Members' Attendance Record 2021/22

Resolved – that Members' Attendance record 2021/22 be noted.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.55 pm)