

Minutes of the meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on
Wednesday 5 February 2025 at 19:00

Present: Councillor Bailey (Chair)
Councillors D Hopkins, Raja, Bamisile, Bell, V Hopkins, Kendrick, Lancaster,
O'Neill, Oguntola and Soden and Independent Members, N Kothari, I Oduko
and G Thompson

Apologies: Councillor Adewale (substituted by Councillor Bell)

Also Present: Councillor J Hearnshaw and L Aird

Officers: M Denny (Assistant Director - Education, Learning and Inclusion), M Heath
(Director - Children's Services), S Marshall (Assistant Director - Children's
Social Care), A Talbot (Principal Officer for Education Outcomes) and
G Vincent (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer)

CYP20 Apologies

Apologies had been received from Councillor Adewale, who was substituted by Councillor Bell.

CYP21 Disclosures of Interest

Councillor David Hopkins advised for transparency that he was Vice Chair of Governors at New Chapter School in Coffee Hall. Councillor Kendrick advised for transparency that he was a governor of Germander Park School and Southwood School in Conniburrow.

CYP22 Minutes

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 10 December 2024 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

CYP23 Recommendations/Action Tracker

RESOLVED -

1. That the Committee note that the item on Child Poverty would be brought to the meeting of the Committee scheduled for June 2025 to incorporate the findings of the Vital Signs MK Community Foundation Report.
2. That the updated Action Tracker be received and noted.

CYP24 Locality Based Working - Schools as Community Spaces

The Assistant Director, Sophie Marshall introduced the report to the committee, highlighting the following points:

- That following COVID, services had been centralised in the Civic Offices.
- That officers were looking into moving back to locality-based working, such as using family and children's centres, GP surgeries, and medical centres.

Questions from members were subsequently received:

- Members inquired whether new buildings were required to facilitate use as quadrant-based hubs, or whether existing facilities could be more effectively utilised, and were told that existing stock was being utilised effectively, with conversations taking place with newer facilities that were still being built.
- Members queried whether cost was an issue in using trust-based facilities such as schools, and asked what work was being done on this. Officers responded, advising the committee that dependent on the trust, facilities were provided free of charge, as trusts recognized the value and their role in the community.
- Louise Aird, Headteacher, stressed to members that many schools wanted to take on a more active role in the community and that schools would welcome the quadrant system and the opportunity to do so. It was noted that due to varying growth numbers, some schools found themselves with extra room, which could be used by the community.
- Members emphasised the importance of sufficient safeguarding and a secure environment.
- A member proposed several considerations to be incorporated into the design of new schools, these included health provision, SEND needs, community events, supplementary education provision, library facilities Youth Clubs, Faith Groups, Forest Schools, access, security, safeguarding, value for money and community access agreements. This was supported by the Committee who resolved to refer the recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.
- The Chair commented on the need for buildings to be designed with the ability to lock doors internally to allow for proper safeguarding alongside community use.
- Members echoed the importance of local provision of services through facilities such as family centres, in particular for those with negative experiences with schools.
- The Committee expressed concern over increasing costs of running venues, and the potential impacts of this on community provision.
- Officers responded to comments from members, acknowledging potential safeguarding concerns if sites had mixed use, but that lessons learnt were being applied to new school designs. Additionally, it was stated that as school leaders were ultimately responsible for the site, the types of use would always be limited.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People be asked to consider how to work towards better community access agreements for schools.

2. That the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People be asked to promote working with School Leaders to enhance community-based provision of services in Milton Keynes.
3. That the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People be asked to adopt the following criteria to be adhered to for all future design briefs for new schools built in Milton Keynes:

“That schools should be designed as community hubs in that:

 - The Community needs for health provision are considered.
 - The provision of the particular needs of SEND students are considered in the design and layout of the school.
 - Daytime events such as community coffee mornings, social gatherings, and the services of the social support sector (e.g Community Action) are factored in.
 - That the possible hiring needs of those offering supplementary education provision are considered (thus providing additional choice for the community at large and an additional income stream for the school).
 - That local library facilities be designed in.
 - That provision for Youth Clubs and Youth Support services be considered.
 - That thought be given to the support of faith groups for the provision of worship.
 - That the sports and leisure facilities of the school be made available to the community at large outside of school’s hours and out of term time.
 - That the needs of the Forest School provision be considered when designing the school grounds.
 - That the provision of lifelong learning services be considered.
 - That any school trust, MAT, or a school transferring to a new site be required to sign as Community Access Agreement as part of an agreement to offer school provision on that site.
 - That schools be designed with access, security and safeguarding as the paramount consideration, with consideration also given to achieving value for money for the wider community. “
 - A member suggested that the college campuses could be used more effectively after standard teaching hours.
4. That the Director of Children’s Services continue to utilise family centres in conjunction with schools when progressing locality-based working.

CYP25 Ofsted Inspection Update

The item was introduced by the Assistant Director, Sophie Marshall, the following salient points were set out:

- That Milton Keynes had been graded good in the Ofsted Inspection that had taken place in October.
- That experience of care leavers had been rated outstanding.

- That areas for improvement had been identified and were set out in the action plan, with looked after children in out of area placements being highlighted as an issue.

Comments were subsequently heard from members, and are set out below:

- Members expressed their thanks and congratulations to officers on the outcome of the inspection and the good work done as corporate parents.
- A member queried whether advertisement for foster carers would increase moving forward as it had previously been an issue. Officers advised that the foster care recruitment strategy had changed, with emphasis on online and radio advertisement. Members were informed that the most successful route for new foster carers was word of mouth. Members stressed the need to recruit foster carers which could handle specific needs.
- Officers were asked whether actions plans would reflect the new grading system, and told the committee that this was not yet known.
- A member inquired about local residential provision, and was told that officers were working towards opening more specialist local provision to enable children to access locally. The Committee were told that a proposed local provision was due to be decided upon in March, which would help shape policy once its impact and success could be determined.
- The Committee asked why children from outside Milton Keynes could access local provision, but local children could not, and was told that this was due to privately owned and operated providers that work with other local authorities.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Committee recorded their thanks and congratulations to Officers for their work and the inspection result.
2. That the Planning Group be asked to consider including an item on the work program on in-house provision of residential care for children as suggested by the Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee.
3. That the Committee noted that fostering remained an issue in particular for those with specific or unique needs, and that Members were encouraged to promote fostering opportunities where possible.

CYP26 Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers

The item was introduced by the Assistant Director – Children’s Services, who set out the following key aspects of the report:

- That 83% of the social worker workforce was permanent, which was better than the average for the area.
- That the primary route for recruitment was through the teaching partnership and apprenticeship routes.
- That it was difficult to retain and recruit senior social workers.
- That the average time of service was 8 ½ years, with roles from deputy team manager up being filled fully by permanent staff.
- That advertisement campaigns had taken place, but it was too soon to gauge their impact.

Members subsequently commented:

- A member inquired what package was offered to staff, and whether counselling was provided. Officers advised that there was a commissioned psychologist where social workers could talk and offload issues separate from the management structure.
- Officers were asked at what stage in their career did staff move on, and was told it was usually when they reached senior social worker level due to a variety of factors.
- A member inquired whether there were secondment opportunities with other authorities, and whether this would improve retention. Officers advised in response that there was a mentorship program across the BLMK Partnership which allowed staff to experience other authorities.
- The Committee sought confirmation on how many student placements came through each year, and how they were utilised. Officers advised that each team had a cap of 4 newly qualified social workers each year, and that currently there were 34 newly qualified social workers in the service. It was stated that due to potential risks involved, it was not recommended that the number exceed the cap.
- In response to member comments, officers clarified that a workforce board was working on a strategy for recruitment and retention of children's social workers. Officers stressed the differences between adult and children's social workers.
- The Committee discussed retention methods, including loyalty payments, interviews with long serving colleagues and support with health issues.
- A member inquired whether it would be possible to overstaff social worker roles to reduce the reliance on agency workers, and was told that it was an aspirational possibility, however it was not currently achievable.
- A committee member asked officers how they were using AI to aid recruitment, as well as radio advertisement. Officers told the committee that AI helped to create algorithms which enabled targeted advertisements, and that radio advertisement was being carried out. Members stressed the importance of using local community radio to aid recruitment.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Director of Children's Services be asked to continue to pursue targeted recruitment of social workers and utilise local resources such as radio stations to do so.
2. That the Committee noted that the Director of Children's Services would develop a recruitment and retention strategy for Children's Social Workers.

CYP27 2024/25 Work Programme

RESOLVED –

1. That the work program be noted.

CYP28 For Information - Milton Keynes Education Outcomes (2024)

This item was for information only and was not discussed.