

**EDUCATION, SKILLS AND GROWTH
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
25 JANUARY 2024
7.00 - 7.49 PM**



Present Virtually:

Councillors Barnard, Ejaz, Gaw, Penfold, Smith, C Thompson, Watts and Webb
Victoria Hill, Parent Governor Representative

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. Scrutiny topic discussion

The Chair of the Education, Skills and Growth Panel, Councillor Cath Thompson, explained to Panel members that the Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) Commission had to create a four-year work plan. In order to do this each O&S Panel was requested to suggest issues they would like to scrutinise so these could be discussed, and agreed formally, at an O&S Commission meeting on 29 February. The Chair also explained she had met with the Executive Director: People, Grainne Siggins, and the Vice Chair of the Panel, Councillor Jodie Watts on 17 January to discuss emerging issues and help inform the meeting.

The Panel had a robust discussion about issues they would like to scrutinise during their term of administration which included:

- Transition from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to Adult and Older Mental Health Services, or transition from children's social care to adult social services, to ensure children were not 'getting lost' at this point due to a reduction in legal duties to provide services.
- Concern was raised about Children Not in Education or Employment (NEET) and their vulnerability, but it was recognised this group of children would not be classed as vulnerable according to the legislative definition.
- Given a recommendation at full Council for Bracknell Forest Council to become part of the Safety Valve Programme, and the Council's focus on Special Educational Needs (SEND), it was suggested the Panel keep a close eye on this area. Discussions included looking at access to services, CAMHS and SEND, the success and impact of the Safety Valve Programme, following one or two anonymised cases from beginning of the programme to end to ensure they were completed within the 20-week timescale, analysing good quality data, tracking the SEND Action Plan, and keeping up to date with the SEND school provision being built in the borough. All Panel members agreed it was an area which required challenge and the Chair informed Panel members the Executive Director: People had agreed to provide her with an update quarterly on this area which would be fed back regularly to O&S Commission members. It was also pointed out that the SEND team were receiving a lot of scrutiny already and they wanted to prevent undue pressure on officers working to deliver on this programme of change, as well as preventing duplication of resources. The majority of Panel members agreed the quarterly update approach would be best and they would see if anything required further scrutiny following those updates.

- Recruitment and Retention of staff across the whole Council was suggested as Bracknell, like many local authorities, were struggling to fill gaps in some service areas. Some Panel members thought this review may need to be more focused and it was suggested the review looked at specific service areas, such as case workers in the SEND team, rather than the whole Council.
- It was suggested scrutinising the Youth Offending Services, but Panel members thought this would be difficult currently.
- The impact of school academisation on the Council's provision of 'core' services and upgrading school buildings in a timely fashion was considered but Panel members agreed their leverage would be minimal on academies.
- The skills shortage locally and the job market not attracting the right candidates was suggested. This prompted a discussion about a previous scrutiny review in 2021 into Apprenticeships, as part of the work of the Panel is to review the implementation and impact of recommendations from previous reviews. It was agreed the Panel would review the Apprenticeships Review and see if this prompted a review into other areas, such as a local skills gap.
- Looked after children and services for care leavers was also discussed as it was four years since it was scrutinised. Areas of focus included the role of the Virtual Head Teacher.
- It was noted the Panel still needed to review recommendations from previous reviews as part of its work programme.

It was RESOLVED that Panel members would suggest the following topics to be considered by the O&S Commission to form part of their four-year work programme:

- **Transition** – focus of the review to be determined as it could potentially focus on the transfer of children from CAMHS to Adult and Older Mental Health Services or the transfer of vulnerable children to more general services. Panel members agreed this would be their first review.
- **Review the Apprenticeships Scrutiny Review and consider a skills gap review** – to check the recommendations had been implemented and consider any issues arising which may lead to a review into a shortage of certain skills in the borough.
- **Recruitment and Retention** – focus of the review to be determined but could look across the whole council or at a specific area.
- **Looked After Children** – access to and quality of services for this cohort and the role of the Virtual Head Teacher.

In addition, Panel members agreed it was important they were kept updated regularly regarding the Safety Valve project and the impact of the Council's investment into Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Services. Councillor Cath Thompson agreed to request quarterly updates from the Executive Director: People and provide a verbal update to members regularly at O&S Commission meetings.