

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING, 26TH JULY, 2022

Present – Councillors Grant (Vice-Chairman), Abdullah, Connor, Finney, McKeon, McMulkin, Mort, Murray, Peel (as deputy for Councillor Donaghy), Priest, Radcliffe, Sanders, Sherrington and Taylor-Burke

Co-opted Members

None in attendance

Also in attendance

Councillor Galloway	- Executive Cabinet Member – Children's Services
Ms B. Brown	- Director of Children's Services
Mr P. Rankin	- Deputy Director of Children's Services
Ms G. Whitehead	- Assistant Director – Inclusive Education and Learning
Mr D. Rice	- Operations Manager/Lead – Holiday Activities and Food
Mrs. H. Gorman	- Borough Solicitor

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Donaghy (Chairman), Hill, McGeown and Rimmer

Councillor Grant in the Chair.

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved - The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on 28th March, 2022 were submitted and signed as a correct record.

2. MINUTES OF INFORMAL MEETING

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the informal meeting of the Committee held on 29th June, 2022 were submitted and noted.

3. PROPOSED COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

The Borough Solicitor submitted the proposed Committee Work Programme for 2022/23 which had been formulated following the informal meeting of this Committee held on 29th June, 2021.

If approved, the Programme would guide the work of the Committee over the course of the Municipal Year.

Resolved – That the 2022/23 Committee Work Programme, as now submitted, be approved.

4. EDUCATION WHITE PAPER RESPONSE

Ms B. Brown gave a presentation on the response of the Children's Services Department to recent legislative changes in the form of the Education White Paper and the SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper.

The presentation advised that the Education White Paper had been published in March 2022 and aimed to encourage schools to increase performance by 2030.

The SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper had also been issued in March, 2022 and aimed to address a system that was currently under pressure and that had nationally poor outcomes, low parental and provider confidence and financial unsustainability. The proposals were in consultation with an expectation to move to legislation quickly.

The changes were heralded as the biggest to the Education System in the last 20 years.

The main aims of the White Paper were summarised as follows:

- improved recruitment, training and development for teachers and the Early Years workforce;
- improved national resources to develop curricula;
- longer school week with a min of 32.5hrs
- better behaviour and attendance with a duty for schools to publish attendance policy;
- legislation to establish a register for children not in school;
- each school to have a parent pledge to show support and tutoring to ensure children were not left behind;
- a fully academy trust led system with a single regulatory approach – all schools would academise by 2030;
- ability for local authorities to set up MATs where “too few strong trusts exist”;
- a collaborative standard to ensure trusts work constructively with all partners;
- local authorities to continue to champion the interests of children;
- local authorities to retain overall sufficiency duty and will determine number of school places as well as managing admissions for all schools with new legal duties to support this; and
- Education Investment Areas to increase funding and support to areas in most need, plus extra funding in priority areas facing the most entrenched challenges.

The aims of the SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) were summarised as follows:

- a single SEND and AP system with national standards, processes and code of practice - all Education Health and Care Plans to be digitised;
- new mandated partnership arrangements in local areas across education, health and care;
- each area to have a local inclusion plan which would support parents to make a decision on which placement is best to meet the child's needs;

- increase in investment in schools budgets and improving mainstream provision;
- AP to be an integral part of SEND systems, with AP to focus on early intervention;
- statutory guidance to integrated care boards to set out how responsibilities for SEND should be discharged;
- new national frameworks for banding and tariffs for SEND and AP placements;
- Ofsted and CQC to update the Area SEND inspection framework; and
- support to local authorities with biggest High Needs deficits via the Safety Valve Programme.

The presentation went on to describe the Safety Valve Programme:

- SEND funding was via the High Needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) ;
- many local authorities had cumulative deficits due to rising demand;
- Bolton High Needs cumulative deficit was £19m;
- Bolton was in the 3rd wave of the Safety Valve programme;
- the DfE would provide financial assistance subject to Bolton working towards an in year balanced budget ;
- we will be required to submit a plan to the DfE in October, 2022 which detailed how this will be achieved;
- the plan would be signed off by the Secretary of State and be published in the public domain; and
- if there was any doubt that the proposals set out in the agreement were not being delivered, the DfE may withholding payment or reduce future instalments that had been agreed.

With regard to local challenges and pressure, the presentation highlighted the following major issues:

- demand management;
- cuts;
- placement sufficiency – LAC, SEND and AP;
- high needs – balancing the budget;

- secondary school places;
- rising cost of living;
- transport – rising fuel costs; and
- recruitment, retention and succession planning.

The presentation also outlined the vision of the Children's Department and the aim of the Children's Directorate Plan:

- all children ready for school;
- keep children learning successfully in our schools;
- keep children safe and help them achieve permanence;
- all children achieve their potential;
- 'One Team' workforce;
- market shaping and sustainability; and
- operating effectively and efficiently to enable current and future delivery.

The presentation also summarised the following deliverables:

- to create a network of family hubs incorporating Early Help and SEND services;
- to develop a start for life offer across all agencies working with children and families;
- maintain and improve quality of education provision in Bolton;
- further develop belonging in Bolton inclusive education strategy and align to developing national legislation;
- reform SEND and deliver a balanced High Needs budget;
- further develop approach to Early Help demand management with the voluntary sector;
- deliver the expectations of the care review;
- develop a Directorate workforce strategy to ensure appropriate capacity, including recruitment, retention, succession planning and development of staff;
- develop and implement a transition strategy to ensure support for children and young people is seamless throughout their journey;
- supporting a skilled workforce which feels valued, is person centred and works together across services and organisations; and

- supporting service users, families and carers through person centred services that deliver their desired outcomes.

Following the presentation, members made the following undermentioned comments/observations:

- the significant challenges to be faced in implementing the changes and raising standards, particularly for primary schools, and the how these could be achieved, particularly as there were currently no details on additional resources – Ms Whitehead advised that only 1% of schools currently achieved 90% and that the standards to be met were challenging. She stated that Bolton was currently above the national average for Key Stage 2 SATS and, although there was no detail at present on additional funding, Bolton was one of the 55 Education Investment areas to potentially receive monies, subject to conditions;
- the benefits of the strong partnerships that existed in Bolton between the Authority and academies and the visible leadership provided by the Children's Department;
- the role of deprivation in outcomes – Ms Whitehead advised that Bolton would be included in the Education Investment Area which was based on outcomes and deprivation;
- the perception of SEND in Schools and with parents – Ms Whitehead outlined the Inclusive Belonging in Bolton strategy, that was adopted in Bolton and had been successfully operating and reinforcing the strong partnership between the Authority and the schools;
- the difficulties facing the Authority in producing a detailed plan for the DfE to demonstrate how debts can be addressed to access additional funding – Ms Whitehead explained how Bolton was liaising with other authorities on best practice and formulating a coordinated approach across Greater Manchester – she also outlined how the safety valve meant that we could bid for additional capital funding if we could demonstrate how our debts could be addressed;

- the issues of setting up a Local Authority Multi-Academy Trust in Bolton – Ms Whitehead advised that due to the large number of Academies already in existence in Bolton, it would be unlikely that a Local Authority Multi-Academy Trust would be required;
- it would be helpful to receive updates on the Authority's response to the Green Paper once consultation started – Ms Whitehead agreed that updates would be provided to the Committee;
- the advantages of counsellors in schools – Ms Whitehead advised that although there were no recommendations in the White Paper in this regard, some Bolton schools did have counsellors and outlined the recent Mental Health support teams that had recently been launched by Greater Manchester; and
- the benefits of tracking the progress of children throughout their educational life which would help to assess whether standards would be achieved and whether intervention was required – Ms Whitehead advised that the Authority monitored standards and statistics and collected national data and that it was the responsibility of the schools and academies to assess the progress of individual children.

Resolved – (i) That Ms Whitehead be thanked for her informative presentation.

(ii) That updates on the response to the SEND Green Paper consultation be provided to this Committee in due course.

5. FAMILY HUBS

Ms B. Brown gave a presentation on Family Hubs, the associated funding and how it would be utilised in Bolton.

Members were advised that the Government had committed £301.75m for 75 upper tier authorities to deliver start for life and family help services over the next three financial years.

The package contained funding for the following components:

- £81.75 - to create a network of family hubs

- £10m - to publish Start for Life offer
- £50m - for parenting programmes
- £10m - for infant-parent mental health support
- £50m - for breastfeeding support
- £10m - for workforce pilots in small number of local authorities.

Members were informed that family hubs were a way of delivering the Supporting Families Vision of an effective Early Help system. They also provided a single access point to a range of services for families such as universal and early help and involved co-location of services and professionals. They also provided seamless access to a whole-family lead practitioner where needed.

The presentation went on to outline the vision for the Bolton Family Hub Model and how it would operate. A diagram demonstrated how they would work in practice with a single access point in each neighbourhood providing seamless service access to integrated family services. Implementation of the hubs would be a programme of change over the next five years.

There would also be core co-located services in each Hub including:

- community midwifery;
- birth registrations;
- public health nursing 0-19/25;
- infant feeding and health families;
- perinatal and parent infant mental health;
- family information and childcare brokerage;
- early years specialist family support;
- VCSE peer support;
- 0-19 targeted early help support; and
- children's mental health including i-thrive.

Overall, the hubs would help align goals and enable the delivery of a seamless model of family support.

Following the presentation, members made the undermentioned comments/observations:

- the use of Policy Development Groups would be helpful in the process of developing the hub structure;
- how the single access point would work – Ms Brown explained that there would be a physical hub and also online access; and
- it was hoped that the hubs would naturally develop into a universal service for all similar to how the Start Well Centres operated.

Resolved – That Ms Brown be thanked for her informative presentation.

6. YOUTH SERVICE AND HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES AND FOOD PROGRAMME

Mr D. Rice gave a presentation on the delivery of the Government funded Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) in Bolton.

The Programme was led locally by Youth Services and a Steering Group and involved enriching activity and food sessions for primary and secondary age children who were eligible for and receiving benefits related school meals.

The sessions offered were:

- 4 hours/4 days at Easter
- 4 hours/4 days during Summer
- 4 hours/4 days at Christmas

There were over 12,500 eligible children in Bolton and the funding was available for 3 years with £1.4 million being allocated per year.

The presentation outlined the five strand delivery method:

- the Local Authority Offer – Play and Youth Service, libraries and schools;

- the Commissioned Offer- Bolton Together and VCSE Sector;
- the Private Provider Offer – Bolton Out of School Clubs (Ofsted)
- the Food Support Offer – Urban Outreach and local business
- the Programme Support Offer – spot purchasing – gaps, training, events, marketing, resources, data capture

Members were advised that the feedback and principles from the pilot year in 2021/22 still applied. The Council and VCSE offer had been built on by a Steering Group led in a Bolton Context.

Eligibility was required to be in areas of high benefits related FSM/ Absolute priority for DfE and the preference was for hot food, but there was some flexibility

Other factors included:

- no vouchers, no fuel support and not to be used to purchase presents or for remote provision.
- working with children with SEND/Additional needs
- working with the secondary school age range
- environment and sustainability; and
- 15% budget flexibility to support

A map showing where eligibility was based across the Borough was also included in the presentation.

It was anticipated that an outcomes report would be brought to this Committee after the Summer activities had been evaluated.

Following the presentation, members made the undermentioned comments/observations:

- issues associated with some children being treated differently than others although it was acknowledged there was a universal offer as well as a targeted one;
- sometimes certain systems did not work as well but were inflexible due to DfE restrictions;

- although everyone would be given the opportunity to take up the offer, not everyone would; and
- it was a complex area that could lead to inconsistencies in delivery but was being well managed by the Children's Department.

Resolved – (i) That Mr Rice be thanked for his informative presentation and that the Team be thanked for their work on delivery of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme.
(ii) That a report on outcomes of the Programme be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee later in the year.

7. MEMBERS BUSINESS

The Committee received the minutes of other meetings of the Council relevant to the remit of this Committee:-

- the Executive Cabinet Member for Children's Services held on 4th April, 27th June and 11th July, 2022

Resolved – That the minutes of the various meetings be noted.

(The meeting started at 6.00pm and finished at 7.45pm)