

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

MEETING, 18TH OCTOBER, 2021

Present – Councillors Iqbal (Chairman), Grant (Vice-Chairman), Donaghy, Hornby, McGeown, Murray, Sherrington (as deputy for Councillor Adia) and Rimmer.

Co-opted Members

Reverend Canon Dr Bracegirdle – Church of England Diocese Representative

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 |
| Ms S. Gilman | - | Assistant Director - Public Health |
| Mr I. D. Mulholland | - | Deputy Democratic Services Manager |

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Abdullah, Adia, Connor, Finney, Hill, Pattison and Taylor-Burke

Councillor Iqbal in the Chair.

12. DAVID AMESS MP

The Chairman referred to the recent death David Amess MP.

The Committee observed a minute silence in his memory.

13. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved - The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on 6th September, 2021 were submitted and signed as a correct record.

14. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

The Borough Solicitor submitted the Committee Work Programme for 2021/22.

Councillor Sherrington requested that an item on Start Well Family Hubs be added to the Work Programme.

Ms Brown suggested that as this was a new area, a briefing note on this matter be provided for all members with a view to its inclusion on next year's Programme when there would be more information to scrutinise.

Resolved – That the 2021/22 Committee Work Programme be noted and that a briefing note be provided to all members on the Start Well Family Hubs with a view to its inclusion on the Work Programme for next year.

15. SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING

Mr P. Rankin gave a presentation on school place planning in Bolton.

Members were advised that the Council had a statutory duty to offer a school place for every child. Since 2009/10, Bolton had seen:

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- a 26% increase in primary school children;
- a 28% increase in secondary school children;
- £66m used to expand existing schools;
- no additional funding for expansions received from Central Government for the last 2 years; and
- several new schools being announced for Bolton in recent years to help meet rising demand in some areas.

The Executive Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Leader of the Council had agreed to escalate the issue and would meet with DfE officials.

The presentation outlined the differences between expansions and new schools and the processes involved with each. In brief, councils were required to work with existing schools to expand whilst Academy Trusts could apply to the DfE for funding for a new build.

With regard to pupil projections, members were advised that they were based on previous patterns and trends which took into account:

- birth data (from NHS);
- movements in and out of Bolton;
- housing developments (with high degree of confidence)
- parental preference
- termly school census was used to update data 3 times a year; and
- highest weighting normally given to the last year, however 2020 was not a normal year.

It was highlighted that projections were not an exact science and subject to change. There was also a need for working capacity across all schools to allow for growth with a recommended 5% (minimum 2%).

Mr Rankin went on to explain that the last 18 months had been a volatile period with Covid-19 and Brexit together with increased elective home education, international travel and a

net increase in children moving into Bolton. The DfE had issued the following statement:

“The 2021 school census data shows notable decreases in enrolment in nursery and primary schools and alternative provision compared to previous years. These are expected to be temporary, as a result of the pandemic, rather than long-term changes. However, using this data results in decreases across future years which are not considered to be realistic estimates of the pupil population over the next ten years”

The presentation also referred to housing yield and implications of length of time to build new homes.

In relation to primary projections, the presentation provided a series of slides containing statistical graphs and geographical charts which demonstrated demand in all the areas of the Borough. They revealed that:

- projections were volatile due to the events of the last 18 months and that demand was not uniform across Bolton;
- the greatest demand was in North and Central Areas - additional capacity needed to be considered, projected drop off in reception demand in this area 2025/26 and discussions progressing with the DfE as to best way to meet that demand;
- demand in the South Area - making current temporary capacity permanent would meet this demand; and
- no immediate action in other areas.

Projections would be updated on receipt of Autumn census data from the DfE (in December, 2021) and could change.

In relation to secondary schools, the presentation stated that:

- 2 new secondary schools had been built in the last 3 years to meet demand;
- projections were more reliable as children were known and within our primary schools; and
- the projection model for Bolton rather than locality based; and

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- two different models to mitigate for this using different weightings for previous year's data.

DfE Statement –

“The 2021 school census data shows notable decreases in enrolment in nursery and primary schools and alternative provision compared to previous years. These are expected to be temporary, as a result of the pandemic, rather than long-term changes. However, using this data results in decreases across future years which are not considered to be realistic estimates of the pupil population over the next ten years”

Various graphs and statistical slides were used to demonstrate the position. They revealed that:

- projections were volatile due to the events of the last 18 months;
- additional capacity was needed to ensure sufficient secondary school places for the future - a Bulge year in 2022/23 needed and equivalent to a 180 intake secondary school from 2023/24 onwards; and
- DfE moving forward delivery of new Secondary Free School in Bolton.

Projections would be updated on receipt of the Autumn census data from the DfE (in December, 2021) and could change.

Following the presentation, members made a number of comments/observations:

- concerns at the lack of Government funding for the last two years;
- the need to take account of cross border pupils when building new schools and ensure that priority was given to pupils living within the Bolton Borough;
- the challenges of parental preference;
- the complexities of DfE wave funding and the lack of control by the Authority on how it was utilised;

- the challenges associated with projections and the need to adjust and amend plans; and
- the limitations of the Local Authority in terms of providing extensions in the right areas.

Resolved – That Mr Rankin be thanked for his informative presentation.

16. ATTAINMENT

Ms G. Whitehead gave a presentation on attainment in primary and secondary schools in Bolton.

The presentation provided a series of detailed graphs which demonstrated performance of pupils in secondary schools and gave a comparison against attainment with statistical neighbours and England.

In relation to primary schools, there had been no statutory assessments since 2019 and therefore there were no performance tables. The DfE would continue to use 2019 data as a starting point regarding support for schools with Ofsted judgements below Good.

Members were informed that all existing statutory Key Stage 1 (KS1) and Key Stage 2 (KS2) assessments would return in 2021/22, following their usual timetable. This included:-

- end of KS1 and KS2 assessments (including tests and teacher assessment)
 - reception baseline assessment
 - phonics screening check
 - year 4 multiplication tables check
 - statutory trialling.

Following the presentation, members made various observations/comments, as follows:

- concerns that Ofsted had suspended their inspections during the pandemic even though teaching had still taken place – members were advised that ratings inspections

had not taken place as schools were unable to improve their ratings. Monitoring visits were still ongoing which schools could choose to defer but Bolton had continued with them;

- the systems that were in place to ensure examination grades were awarded consistently and fairly – Ms Whitehead advised that teacher assessed grades went through a rigorous process of moderation to ensure they were in line with expected grades and other schools - there was also an appeal process in place and it was noted that there had been fewer appeals lodged; and
- the possible link between higher grades and assessments being year-round rather than being based on a single examination.

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

17. MEMBERS BUSINESS

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

- Executive Cabinet Member for Children's Services held on 13th September and 11th October, 2021.

(The meeting started at 6.00pm and finished at 7.10pm)