

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING, 1ST FEBRUARY, 2021

Present – Councillors Iqbal (Chairman), Brady (Vice-Chairman), Connor, Dean, Donaghy, Ibrahim, Khurram, McGeown, McMulkin (as deputy for Councillor Ismail), Murray, Newall, Walsh and Watters.

Co-opted Member

Reverend Canon Dr Bracegirdle – Church of England Diocese Representative

Also in attendance

Councillor Galloway	-	Executive Cabinet Member for Children
Ms B. Brown	-	Director of Children's Services
Mr P. Rankin	-	Deputy Director of Children's Services
Ms H. Lowey	-	Director of Public Health
Ms S. Cornwell	-	Head of SEND and Principal Educational Psychologist
Mrs S. Bailey	-	Principal Democratic Services Officer

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Ismail

Councillor Iqbal in the Chair

21. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee held on 22nd December, 2020 were submitted and signed as a correct record.

22. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2020/2021

The Borough Solicitor submitted a report which detailed the Committee Work Programme for 2020/2021.

Resolved – That the Work Programme for 2020/2021 be noted.

23. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES OVERVIEW

Ms S Cornwell gave a presentation on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision in Bolton.

Members were informed of the production of a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment which focused on 0–25-year-olds and included data analysis and recommendations. It had been developed by a working group of key personnel from the Local Authority, Public Health, the CCG and Bolton Parent Carers.

The production of the document was recommended by the DfE and had identified the following key findings:

- 8,590 children and young people (CYP) with SEND (6,068 on SEN Support and 2,522 on EHCPs);
- 2/3^{rds} were male and 1/3rd were female;
- disproportionality by ethnicity - the proportion of black children with SEND was more than twice the percentage of black children in the general population;
- CYP with SEND were clustered in areas with higher levels of deprivation;
- the numbers with early years inclusion support funding had risen 55% over the last four years;

- in the last decade, numbers on SEN Support had nearly tripled and numbers on EHCPs had doubled;
- proportionally, there had been an overall slight decrease in % of school population classed as SEND;
- there was a current and projected shortage of special school places;
- Nearly 1/3rd of CYP with SEND had a moderate learning difficulty - 1/5th have speech, language and communication needs and 1/5th had social, emotional and mental health needs;
- the biggest % increases over the last 3 years had been in multi-sensory impairment; SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need, and; Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD); and
- nearly half of all CYP with SEND had social care involvement.

With regard to educational and training outcomes, it had been found that CYP with SEND had poorer educational outcomes than CYP without SEN, which replicated the national and regional picture. However, CYP with SEND in Bolton generally did better than comparators at Key Stage 2.

The picture was more mixed at Key Stage 4 with Attainment 8 for those with an EHCP being better than regional and statistical comparators but lower than national, but for those on SEN Support was lower than all comparators. At 77.74%, Bolton had the lowest proportion of 16-17 year olds with SEN in education and training out of all comparators.

In terms of need:

- nearly 1/3rd of CYP with SEND had a moderate learning difficulty, 1/5th had speech, language and communication needs and 1/5th had social, emotional and mental health needs;
- the biggest % increases over the last 3 years had been in multi-sensory impairment, SEN support but no specialist

assessment of type of need, and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD); and

- nearly half of all CYP with SEND had social care involvement.

In respect of Educational and Training Outcomes:

- CYP with SEND had poorer educational outcomes than CYP without SEND (replicated the national and regional picture);
- CYP with SEND in Bolton generally did better than comparators at Key Stage 2;
- the picture was more mixed at Key Stage 4; Attainment 8 for those with an EHCP was better than regional and statistical comparators but lower than national, but for those on SEN Support was lower than all comparators; and
- at 77.74%, Bolton had the lowest proportion of 16-17 year olds with SEN in education and training out of all comparators.

Evidence from parents, young people and children involved:

- ideas for change in services:
- improved communication of key information including offer, processes and pathways;
- improvements to SEN Support provision;
- ensuring take up of SEND training for professionals;
- assessing and monitoring Short Breaks offer; and
- improved inclusive approach for CYP with SEND at mainstream schools.

Recommendation contained within the JSNA included:

- a review what type of SEND provision was best to meet growing local needs (including special schools and inclusive mainstream schools) - this could include increased investment in services for children and young people with SEND, given the growing population;

- work with SENCOs in order to ensure the accurate identification of need;
- development of a more robust SEN Support offer;
- development of an offer for neurodiverse children and young people, including pre and post diagnostic support, CAMHS and transition support, ensuring the multidisciplinary system was working well, including for young people who have negative Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule assessments but still had needs;
- ensuring that the information in the JSNA was used to inform joint commissioning and review, align and develop our service/community-based support models to meet the current need and to manage future demand in those areas already identified as increasing in numbers e.g. Autism, emotional health and wellbeing;
- ensure better recording of post-KS4 and post-19 destination data for young people with SEND;
- set up collection of data on accommodation for young people 18 plus with SEND;
- improve data capturing and intelligence on ASD;
- developing a person centred approach to outcomes, developed with and for young people such as reviewing our short break model and offer to make sure that we are targeting those young people who need a short break the most; and
- developing a mechanism for recording access to Short Breaks care, including direct payments, that could be easily accessed and shared in the form of an annual report.

The presentation advised of the progress to date in implementing the recommendations. They had been reflected in a SEND Action Plan which was informing the work of the SEND Strategic Steering Group and work regarding special school provision was ongoing with expansion projects at Firwood and Rumworth planned.

The SEND Handbook had also been launched on 12th January, 2021 which was hoped would help with the accurate identification of need and a more robust SEN Support offer. Connexions had also created processes this year to track the destinations of those Young People in Year 14.

The presentation went to give an overview of Specialist Provision for 0-16 years by type of school. Details of Bolton Special School placements, numbers attending and current physical capacity were provided.

Members were also informed of the production of a revised SEND handbook which had been structured to act as a guide through the SEND journey. It also contained many new elements and included a section on identification of need which focused on descriptors of each need and prompts for initial meetings with parents to aid in the joint identification of needs and to start working in a collaborative way from the outset. For each area of need, the handbook detailed key areas of concern, typical indicators and features that created an inclusive school/classroom environment to meet the need.

The presentation went on to focus on Quality First Inclusive Teaching which was designed to form the basis of an inclusive teaching approach for any child with additional need such as those with SEND, LAC and EAL/INA children.

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

- the mental health provision that was being put in place to help children who were being adversely affected by the recent lockdown – members were assured that there was a strong multi agency approach to ensuring that the social, emotional and mental health needs of children were being met during this challenging time - the Council continued to work closely with colleagues in special schools to ensure that measures were in place to support families and to plan for future need;

- the measures that had been put in place to identify signs that a child was suffering from social, emotional and mental health issues – members were advised that this was a significant priority in schools, particularly since the effects of the first lockdown had been seen – the recent publication of the revised SEND handbook contained clear signs to look for and would assist in identifying children who were in need of extra support;
- concerns at the shortage of SEND places in Bolton, and the need to for children to be placed in schools out of the Borough – members were informed that it was a challenging situation with the position in Bolton being similar to that of the national picture – members were reminded of the inclusivity approach being adopted by the Authority where the aim was to provide specialist provision within mainstream schools, however, some children had such specialised needs that they needed to be placed out of the Borough with providers that could meet their particular requirements – there was a coherent strategy for pupil place planning and work was ongoing in partnership to manage provision with the aim of inclusivity for all;
- the ongoing budget constraints and how the reducing resources were being planned for – members were informed that schools funding came from different budget streams and that ongoing consultation with schools had led to the formation of a working group to discuss the inclusivity agenda and agreement had been reached for the allocation of £1.1m of targeted investment into the inclusion programme;
- an update on inclusive schools that were currently operating would be useful – it was agreed that this would be provided to members following the meeting;
- the establishment of the Primary Autism Unit – members were advised that this was progressing at Moorgate School and building works were underway;
- the status of the pupil referral units – members were informed that these were now operated by the Bolton Impact Trust with no current in-house provision – their

services were quality assured and were in close dialogue with the Council – they aimed to provide an alternative provision for a limited period until a return to mainstream schools could be achieved;

- the use of independent schools – members were advised that the Authority could make use of places at independent schools at a cost – the schools were inspected by Ofsted and places there were classed as out of Borough even if they were located in Bolton as they fell outside Local Authority control;
- the measures being put in place to ensure all families had equal access to resources for home schooling during the pandemic – members were assured that access for all children to resources was a priority and schools were making every effort to ensure that all children were supplied with the necessary materials and devices to enable them to learn at home - alternative methods were provided if internet was not available; and
- the length of time taken for children to get back into a school setting – members were advised that many protocols and handbooks had been revised and that decisions on placements were being made faster – the Director of Children’s Services was now a member on the Fair Access Panel and she reassured members that this area was a priority for the Authority.

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

24. COVID-19 UPDATE

Ms H. Lowey and Mr P. Rankin gave a presentation which updated the Committee on the latest position regarding Covid-19 in Bolton and within schools.

Members were advised that rates continued to be fragile and were high in the working age group. The new variant was shown to spread more easily and was now the dominant strain in PCR positive cases.

The ability to stay at home varied and was more difficult for those in more deprived areas or on lower incomes or with insecure jobs.

Non-compliance with measures was a risk to the control of spread and there were concerns about failure to isolate after a positive test.

The presentation also provided details of the vaccination programme which had initially focused on preventing deaths and protecting the health and social care system and was now being rolled out to other vulnerable groups. Treatments for seriously ill people had improved but COVID was still much more deadly than flu.

The presentation went on to focus on children and young people and reported that case numbers had begun to rise for all younger age brackets at the beginning of each term.

In the most recent school term covering November to December 2020, children aged 11-15 years had seen the largest number of cases, which had gradually reduced over the 2 months. In recent weeks, there had been a rise in cases in children aged 0-4 years, with most recent cases being found in young people aged 16-19 years.

With regard to Covid-19 education settings, members were informed that approximately 15% of children were attending schools on site. Other children were receiving online learning with 3,500 devices being provided by the DfE via maintained schools.

In relation to Assessments for 2021, consultation had been completed on GCSE, AS and A Level and grades should be awarded. Primary schools would have Teacher Assessments. Lateral Flow Device Testing was also now in place for secondary and primary schools. The impact of funding and demand on Early Years Providers and wrap around care was being monitored closely.

In relation to Children's Services, there had been an increased demand on Children's social care services and Child Protection Plans were up to 423 which was a 35% increase since 31st March, 2020. There was also increased pressure on the LAC System with 628 Looked After Children (down from 631 at 31st March, 2020) with 22 awaiting adoption orders and 12 awaiting discharge.

The presentation concluded that Covid-19 would continue to have an impact on all children in Bolton for several years to come.

Following the presentation, members acknowledged the huge effect that Covid-19 had had on schools and thanked all staff for their efforts during the pandemic.

Resolved – That Ms Lowey and Mr Rankin be thanked for their informative presentation.

25. MEMBERS BUSINESS

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

- (a) the Executive Cabinet Member for Children held on 11th January, 2021

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

(The meeting started at 6.00pm and finished at 7.55pm)