

## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

MEETING, 24<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST, 2022

Present – Councillors Donaghy (Chairman), Grant (Vice-Chairman), Connor, Finney, McGeown, McKeon, McMulkin, Mort, Murray, Priest, Radcliffe, Sanders, Sherrington and Taylor-Burke

### Co-opted Members

None in attendance

### Also in attendance

Councillor Galloway	-	Executive Cabinet Member – Children's Services
Mr P. Rankin	-	Deputy Director of Children's Services
Mr G. Kelly	-	Capital Programme Manager – Children's Services
Mrs. V. Ridge	-	Democratic Services Manager

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Abdullah, Hill and Rimmer and from Reverend Canon Dr Bracegirdle (Co-opted Member)

Councillor Donaghy in the Chair.

## **8. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Resolved - The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2022 were submitted and signed as a correct record, subject to the removal of Councillor Radcliffe from the list of attendees.

## **9. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23**

The Borough Solicitor submitted the Committee Work Programme for 2022/23 which had been formulated following the informal meeting of this Committee held on 29<sup>th</sup> June, 2022 and which would guide the work of the Committee over the course of the Municipal Year.

The issue of corporate parenting was raised and that training for all members in this area should happen prior to the start of the first Scrutiny Committee.

Mr Rankin stated that corporate parenting training was currently being programmed for all members of the Council. He acknowledged that for future years, sessions would be timetabled so that members were trained prior to the start of the Committee Cycle.

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

## **10. SCHOOL PLACE PRESSURES AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

Mr P. Rankin and Mr G. Kelly gave a presentation on school place planning in Bolton and associated pressures.

The Council had a Statutory Duty to offer a school place for every child and since 2009/10, Bolton had seen:

- a 26% increase in primary school children;
- a 28% increase in secondary school children;
- £66m used to expand existing schools;
- several new schools announced in recent years to help meet rising demand in some areas; and
- £6.44M Basic Need confirmed for 2023/24 and 2024/25.

The presentation outlined the differences between expansion of existing schools and building of 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 various factors were taken into account:

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

It was noted that projections were not an exact science and subject to change and that a minimum 2% working capacity was required across all schools to allow for growth.

The position over the last three years had been volatile with Covid, Brexit, increased elective home school education and international travel and there was still a net increase in children moving into Bolton.

The DfE had released a statement that although the 2021 school census data showed notable decreases in enrolment in nursery and primary schools and alternative provision compared to previous years, these were expected to be temporary due to the pandemic rather than long-term changes. However, using this data resulted in decreases across future years which were not considered to be realistic estimates of the pupil population over the next ten years.

With regard to primary schools, the presentation went on to provide various statistical graphs that outlined projected numbers and capacity in all areas of the Borough. The following conclusions were made:

- projections were volatile due to the events of the last 3 years;
- demand was not uniform across Bolton;
- the greatest demand was in the North and Central areas - additional bulge year capacity to be considered – expressions of interest requested from schools to focus on Astley Bridge - projected drop off in reception demand in this area 2025/26;
- demand in the South area - making current temporary capacity permanent to meet demand in the Great Lever area;
- the need to be mindful of rising surplus places around periphery of the Borough, especially in the West and particularly Horwich - implemented proposals to reduce planned admission numbers in Westhoughton from 2023; and
- discussions ongoing with school clusters.

With regard to secondary schools, there had been two new secondary schools built in the last four years to meet demand. Projections were more reliable as children were known and within the Borough's primary schools but there was a need to remain vigilant of possible increase in demand, given recent volatility. The projection model was for all of Bolton rather than locality based.

Various statistical graphs were provided that outlined projected numbers and capacity in all areas of the Borough. The following conclusions were made:

- projections were volatile due to the events of the past 3 years;
- additional capacity was needed to ensure sufficient secondary school places for the future;
- bulge year in 2023/24;
- pressures up until 2027/28 then a reduction in demand in Year 7 admissions;
- ongoing pressures on in-year admissions;
- the DfE had currently put on hold proposals for a new Wave 14 secondary free school; and

- discussions were progressing with existing secondary schools regarding expansion options and in year pressures.

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

- temporary buildings to accommodate additional children rather than school expansions were not always ideal – Mr Rankin stated that the temporary accommodation available was of good quality and well equipped and that many schools using these arrangements continued to be popular and over-subscribed;
- concern that funding was not allocated to local authorities to build new schools in their own right although it was noted that the council have received Basic Needs Funding for school expansions;
- the use of the school census to assess movements into and out of the Borough;
- difficulties in predicting numbers of International New Arrivals to the Borough – Mr Rankin advised that the pandemic had limited the numbers of International New Arrivals to Bolton although these were slowly returning to pre-pandemic levels – he stated that many families from within the UK were also moving to Bolton for various reasons;
- the good working relationships between schools and the Authority and a willingness to adapt arrangements for the greater good of the children in the Borough such as reducing or increasing planned admission numbers;
- the use of capacity in existing school buildings to accommodate increasing numbers in certain areas;
- the White Paper would give authorities a greater role in pupil projection management and discussions with academies to assist with this although it was acknowledged that arrangements already worked well in Bolton;
- the difficulties in predicting increased pupil numbers and when impact may be realised from the building of new housing estates in certain areas and how we can assess their accuracy – Mr Rankin stated that much work was

undertaken to ascertain when new housing estates would be completed and the when the resulting impact on local schools would occur – the DfE had recently confirmed that the projections of the Authority in this regard were as accurate as they could be; and

- the potential to review the admission criteria if there was a need for children in certain areas of the Borough to attend schools further away if they had the capacity.

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

## **11. MEMBERS BUSINESS**

(a) The Committee was informed that a question had been submitted by Councillor Priest for consideration under Standing Order 36, as follows:-

### **Question**

The Department for Education published the ‘Condition of School Buildings Survey Key findings’ in May 2021 and there were various articles in the press including the Guardian where the Government was urged to tackle crumbling school buildings as Unions expressed shock at the state of our schools. Out of 20,000 school buildings inspected, that constitutes 99.8% of the estate, between 2017 and 2019, a total of 19,442 had at least one building component that had “major defects” or was “not operating as intended”.

The average condition need per school for the North West was £484,065 and the average need per m2 was £146. Whilst not the worst in England the Government response that the new school rebuilding programme would transform the learning environment at 500 schools over the next decade, prioritising schools in poor condition or with potential safety issues, is obviously totally inadequate when we are looking at over 19 thousand schools having major defects.

Can the executive member for Children’s Services tell us exactly how Bolton schools measure against this reports’

criteria and when you will be in a position to share with us a timed, costed plan to ensure that all Bolton schools are fit for purpose?

### **Answer**

The State funded school system that operates across England is a complex one, which comprises LA Community, Voluntary Controlled, Voluntary Aided, and Academies and Free schools. Local Authorities are only responsible for building maintenance at LA Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools. Annual capital funding, in the form of School Condition Allocation grant funding is provided to local authorities to help them address building condition needs in their schools. The amount of funding allocated by the DfE to Local Authorities is based upon the number of pupils in Community and Voluntary Controlled schools. As more schools convert to academy status, the amount of School Condition Allocation funding provided to Local Authorities diminishes, and so will the number of schools that Local Authorities will be responsible for. In addition, schools receive devolved formula capital grant funding and revenue to help them with undertaking minor works. At present, less than 50% of primary schools and less than 20% of secondary schools in Bolton fall under LA Community or Voluntary Controlled status. The majority of schools in Bolton lie outside of Council control and responsibility in respect of building maintenance. These other schools are funded separately by the DfE in respect of building maintenance and property repairs. As a result, the council does not have visibility of the condition of all school buildings in the borough and cannot advise on how all schools measure against the report's criteria.

Separate to the DfE exercise, the Council commissioned its own condition surveys of all LA Community and Voluntary Controlled schools in 2021, and all included schools have been provided with a copy of their surveys, so that they can address any minor works that are identified and so that they can budget for larger, future schemes. The Council's condition surveys are used to identify priority liabilities, especially those that may become a health and safety issue, or could lead to a potential

school closure, and these surveys are used to create an annual programme of works referred to as the School Building Maintenance Programme, which is supported through the Departmental Capital Programme, with funding provided by the School Condition Allocation grant that is provided annually by the DfE. Schools are also required to contribute to projects that are delivered through this programme. The amount of funding allocated to support this programme is directly proportionate to the amount of funding received each year from the DfE. In 2021/22 this amounted £3.2M and in 2022/23 was £3.5M. It is believed that the increase in funding reflected rising construction and materials costs, as well as helping to off-set the higher costs of undertaking energy saving initiatives and carbon reduction within schemes. The annual school building maintenance programme typically includes amongst others, schemes to undertake roofing repairs and replacement of heating systems, to ensure that schools remain open, and that pupils and staff are accommodated within appropriately safe environments. Schemes are identified ahead of time, and feasibilities and cost estimates are developed with the assistance of colleagues in Place, utilising the Council's partner, Robertson. Once the broad details of the schemes are agreed, the proposed programme is presented to the Executive Member to confirm funding support. Schemes within the current 2022/23 programme were approved by the Executive Member at the meeting on the 4th April this year.

Resolved – That a summary of the condition surveys carried out by the Council in 2021 of all Local Authority Community and Voluntary Controlled schools be provided to this Committee.

(b) 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 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2022

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

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



