

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING, 7TH DECEMBER, 2020

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

Co-opted Members

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 S. Gilman	-	Assistant Director of Public Health
Ms D. Butler	-	Principal Educational Improvement Professional
Ms C. Fletcher	-	Principal Educational Improvement Professional
Ms H. Shearer	-	Start Well Professional Lead Early Years Education and Childcare
Ms G. Whitehead	-	11-25 Team Manager
Mrs V. Ridge	-	Democratic Services Manager
Mrs S. Bailey	-	Principal Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Ismail and from Ms J. Bond (Co-Opted Member)

Councillor Iqbal in the Chair

14. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee held on 19th October, 2020 were submitted and signed as a correct record.

15. 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.

16. SCHOOL RESULTS

Ms B. Brown gave an overview of the presentation on school results with a focus on belonging and the effect of inclusion and equity across learning, early help, school Improvement and SEND.

The first part of the presentation focused on belonging and Ms Brown outlined the advice issued by the Association of Children’s Directors that local authorities had a legal responsibility to champion the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people to promote educational excellence and ensure fair access to school places for all learners and outlined Bolton’s strategic intent in this regard.

Particular reference was made to the following Bolton policies and how they contributed towards belonging:

- Vision 2030;
- People Plan;
- JSNA;
- Children and Young People Plan;
- Joint Commissioning Strategy and GM Commissioning;
- SEND Strategy;
- Early Help Strategy;
- School Improvement Strategy; and
- Inclusive Education and Learning Strategy.

The presentation also referred to co-production, partnerships and connections and ambitions for a Bolton partnership that involved:

- outcome focused;
- inclusive;
- equitable;
- sustainable;
- creating acceptance in our education system and beyond;
- restructuring to support children to access services within schools at the point of need;
- reduced exclusions;
- an improved 'in school offer'; and
- an aligned approach with ministerial ambition and the ambition of local leadership underpinned by the themes of co-production, engagement and consultation.

Details of the existing staffing arrangements were provided together with the following proposed structural changes and steps being put in place as a foundation:

- an Invitation to Co-production;
- Director of Children's Services;
- Deputy Director;
- Assistant Director Integrated Commissioning September 2020;
- Assistant Director Inclusive Education and Learning – 2nd recruitment November 2020;
- Strategic Lead for School Improvement x3;

- Head of SEND and Inclusion – to be advertised October 2020 ;
- Head of Virtual School Appointed starts December 2020;
- consultation with School leaders and SENCO on future structure of Behaviour Support and the links to the locality EH services;
- Guide to Alternative Provision and DPS framework out for comment October 2020; and
- Survey monkey out to all Heads and Sencos in November to consult on future structures for supporting Inclusion.

Members were informed of the seven strands of system improvement which were aligned to early help and demand management place planning, namely, Early Years, School Improvement and Governance, Inclusion, SEND, Transition and Health and Wellbeing. The next steps involved a strategy for Inclusion co-produced with schools, self-assessment to inform future structures, clear delivery objectives and success measures, agreement on High needs funding and funding formula and creating capacity to deliver impactful and sustainable change.

The presentation went on summarise the indicative priorities for an inclusive and equitable Education Strategy, as follows:

- ensure every child has a sense of belonging and feels part of a school setting or college community irrespective of background, needs or culture to enable them to achieve positive outcomes;
- to support the wellbeing and social and emotional and mental health needs of all young people to enable them to be successful in their place of learning;
- to work with partner agencies to make sure there is a systemic approach to working with the families of our most vulnerable;
- learners to ensure effective early intervention to meet need (Early Help);
- to ensure that all young people are ready for the next phase of learning and that transitions support them in

developing a new sense of belonging in the new environment; and

- to ensure that additional support is available for young people and for schools and settings where there is a breakdown in the sense of belonging in any learning environment.

A diagram explaining how success could be measured was also included and the next steps were identified as:

- use of Inclusion and Engagement Consultation Group and Formula Funding Group as advisory and development group;
- Director of Children's Services to attend groups with key officers to bring consistency to communication and to agree a short action plan;
- here and now/future ambition;
- consider seconded project management resource;
- agree transfer of 0.5% of schools block and invest in solutions to support schools;
- consider school to school support model – use local expertise;
- cluster funding models for primary;
- SEMH review needs progressing; and
- inclusive training approaches – ACES /restorative models.

The second part of the meeting focused on education performance and Mr Rankin together with Ms D. Butler, Ms C. Fletcher, Ms H. Shearer and Ms G. Whitehead, gave a combined presentation.

Members were informed that, in response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, there had been changes to the accountability arrangements. Performance tables had been suspended for the 2019 to 2020 academic year. The DfE would not hold schools to account on the basis of assessment data from summer 2020 and that data will not be used by others, such as Ofsted and local authorities, to hold schools to account. The

DfE would continue to use 2019 data as a starting point for any conversation about support for schools with Ofsted judgements below good.

With regard to Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), members were advised of the impact of COVID-19 on take up of funded places:

- funded places for vulnerable 2 year olds was 71% (Autumn Term 2019) reduced to 58% (Autumn Term 2020);
- funded 3 and 4 year accessing universal funded early education places - take up for 2019 Autumn Term was 100% reducing to 95.5% for Autumn Term 2020; and
- 30 hours extended funded places for working parents - 2019 Autumn Term was 96% take up, reducing to 92% in 2020 Autumn Term.

In relation to EYFS Performance Data:

- July 2020 EYFS profile cancelled, therefore no data to record for Good Level of Development (GLD);
- latest published rate of GLD was at 67.3% (2019);
- Bolton Early Years Integrated Communication and Language Pathway launched; and
- 95% of early years settings and 100% of nursery schools are judged by Ofsted to be good or better.

The impact for the Academic Year ahead:

- nationally a revised EYFS would come into effect September 2021, being piloted in September 2020;
- Bolton's 28 primary schools as early adopters;
- July 2021 an incomplete data set before the changes come into effect September 2021;
- linking with DfE to roll out training to all EYFS settings ready for September 2021; and
- Early Adopter Schools are sharing learning across Bolton.

The following EYFS priorities were identified:

- continued focus on school readiness through partnership working with schools and Early Years settings to prevent the attainment gap opening up;
- identify specific cohorts and neighbourhoods for targeted activity, including specific gap-narrowing projects with schools and settings with the highest numbers of disadvantaged children;
- implementation of the Bolton Early Years Integrated Communication and Language Pathway;
- increased focus on early communication and language development and reducing the word gap with universal key messages;
- including targeted and specialist parent-child interaction groups in targeted neighbourhoods, delivered through Start Well Centres, schools and Early Years settings; and
- embedding of Wellcomm screening tool with specialist support.

With regard to plans for the 2020/21 national curriculum assessments, the Department for Education (DfE) had published information for the next academic year within Section 4 of the Guidance for full opening schools. The intention was for all existing statutory key stage 1 and 2 assessments to return in 2020/21, following their usual timetable. This included the:

- end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 assessments (including tests and teacher assessment);
- Phonics screening check – Autumn Year 2, Summer Year 1; and
- Year 4 multiplication tables check.

The DfE had commented that it was recognised that pupils will have missed a critical period of their education in the 2019/2020 academic year.

With regard to Key Stages 4 and 5 examinations, GCSE and A Level exams did not take place this summer with Centre assessed grades. Young People were able to progress onto the next steps of their lives.

With regard to NEET and Not Known performance, members were advised that:

- there was a reduction in Not Knowns;
- successfully bid for ESF NEET Programme;
- new NEET provision group set up – JCP, Bolton College;
- active member of Bolton WBL Network; and
- Greater Manchester Young Peoples Guarantee.

A graph showing the percentage of 16-17 year old NEETS or whose activity was not known between 2017 and 2020 was provided together with comparative figures in England.

With regard to the Cross-Phase Reading Project 2020/21, it now noted that Key stage specific development work in language, phonics, vocabulary and reading to impact on pupil outcomes had been undertaken in previous years. To further develop this, both research-based training and collaborative working across EYFS, Primary and Secondary was planned for this year.

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

- the importance of inclusion in the Council's policy framework and the positive steps being taken by the Department to produce a school environment that supported this and allowed all children to thrive;
- support for the goal to have a majority of children in mainstream schools and the ways being explored to remodel and support this ambition;
- an acknowledgement that a positive inclusive school experience was just as important as academic success;
- clusters of schools – officers explained that arrangements were in place for the Head Teachers of schools in the same geographical area to be grouped together to share experiences; and
- the different approaches to inclusion in local authority schools and academies - Mr Rankin advised that from a SEND and inclusion perspective, the Council was looking

to promote a single approach across Bolton as a whole and not on an individual school basis.

Resolved – That officers be thanked for their comprehensive presentation.

17. COVID-19 UPDATE

Ms S. Gilman gave an update on the latest position regarding Covid-19 in Bolton.

In relation to the seven days up to 1st December, 2020, there had been 545 new cases reported with a weekly incidence rate of 189.5 per 100,000 residents. Both the incidence rate and positivity rates for testing were reducing.

Ms Gilman advised that the impact of the restrictions was working to reduce numbers but there was still a need to be vigilant.

Members enquired about the immunisation programme and whether the vaccine was going to be made available relatively early in Bolton given that rates had previously been high.

Ms Gilman advised that she had no information regarding plans for widespread Bolton vaccination, although GPs would be offering it to targeted groups, namely the elderly, in the near future.

Resolved – That the update be noted.

18. 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's Services held on 2nd and 30th November, 2020.

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

(The meeting started at 6.00 p.m. and finished at 7.05 p.m.)