

**MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE,
COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALSALL COUNCIL HOUSE.**

Thursday 12 January 2023 at 6.00 P.M.

Committee Members present:

Councillor S. Ditta (Chair)
Councillor B. Bains
Councillor R. Burley
Councillor S. Cheema
Councillor P. Kaur
Councillor I. Hussain
Councillor A. Hussain
Councillor S.B. Hussain
Councillor R. Martin

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor Mark Statham – Education and Skills

Officers Present:

Sharon Kelly - Director Access and Inclusion
Rob Thomas - Head of Access
Jack Thompson – Democratic Services Officer
Thomas Newman – Finance Business Partner for Children Services
Helena Kucharczyk – Head of Service for Quality Assurance and Performance Information

Welcome and introductions were made.

42/22 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors: C. Towe, L. Rattigan and E. Lee.

43/22 Substitutions

Councillor R. Martin substituted for Councillor E. Lee for the meeting.

44/22 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

Councillor R. Martin disclosed that she was a governor at the Pelsall Village School.

There were no further declarations of interest or party whip for duration of the meeting.

45/22 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no agenda items requiring the exclusion of the public.

46/22 Minutes

A copy of the Minutes of the meeting held on the 28 November 2023 was submitted [annexed].

It was requested that 'social care internship' contained within minute 37/22 be changed to 'special educational needs (SEN) internship'. In addition, that these internships were being developed by HR and therefore fell outside the remit of this Committee, however, information on these internships would be provided as part of any Special Educational Needs update presented to the Committee in the future.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2023, as amended, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

47/22 2022 Educational Attainment and Ofsted School Inspection Outcomes

The Chair invited the Portfolio Holder for Education to introduce the report.

The Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that there had been an improvement in the Ofsted ratings for schools within the Borough and was pleased Walsall had been chosen by the Government to have an Educational Investment Area.

The Head of Service for Quality Assurance and Performance Information gave a presentation on the educational outcomes in the Borough [annexed]. At the end of the presentation, the Director for Access and Inclusion added that there had been improvements in educational outcomes, but the Council needed to continue to focus on early years. The Council already had a dedicated early years programme. Additionally, there were outstanding maintained nurseries and good private nurseries and the Council needed to help enable them to improve further. The Department for Education was providing additional funding for early years, and the Council was currently working on upskilling early years staff. The Council was also working with the West Midlands Combined Authority on devolution of powers around early years.

The Chair thanked the education team for the work they were carrying out. However, it was noted that it was a recurring issue that the Borough was behind the national average for educational outcomes and the Council needed to understand why this was happening. In addition, the Chair agreed that the Council should be focusing on closing gap in early year's educational attainment and to take pressure off parents as well.

The Head of Service for Quality Assurance and Performance added that young children were not necessarily in provisioned education and the Council was seeking ways to identify children with extra needs earlier. To help with this family hubs were being set up in Walsall and the Council was focusing on the first 1001 days of a child's life. In addition, the Director for Access and Inclusion added that the Council would focus on continued partnership work and needed to identify children who required extra support before they entered a provisioned educational settings.

A member asked what the root cause of educational outcome poor performance was. The Head of Service for Quality Assurance and Performance explained that there had been a drop in education performance across the country however Walsall had fallen a further three percent below the national average. The Council was currently asking schools for reasons as to why this might be the case and was asking them to provide additional data to the Council. In addition, the Council was asking health visitors for their data as well. The Director for Access and Inclusion added that the Council was trying to gather data to determine the outcomes for children who attended different early years provision. This would enable the Council to identify issues in early years provision.

The Chair asked if the Council gathered information on different areas and whether the disparity of facilities had an impact on the outcomes for children in early years. The Director for Access and Inclusion explained that the Council did carry out locality assessments and there were some discrepancies between areas. However, the current data showed there was enough provision for early years throughout the Borough but there was differing needs in certain areas.

A Member asked if children who spoke English as a second language had more help in early years education and if this was why they performed better than native English speakers later on? The Director for Access and Inclusion responded that all children in education would receive an education to their needs. The Council had completed work to help children with English as an additional language and this was reflected in the educational outcomes of those children. The Council was continuing to collect data to identify groups that were falling behind and developing programmes to help those children. The Head of Service for Quality Assurance and Performance Information added that the Council's data showed that children from Asian backgrounds performed better at Key Stage 2 to 4. The Council needed to determine if children with English as an additional language were changing in demographic and thus would need different support. There was a change in demographic in regard to children with English as an additional language.

In response to a Members question the Head of Service for Quality Assurance and Performance Information informed the Committee that 71% of the Academies within the Borough were rated by Ofsted as either Good or Outstanding. Regionally 80% were rated Good or Outstanding and nationally this was 81%. The ratings within the Borough were lower than the average, but it was important to recognise that schools often became academies because of poor Ofsted ratings and had to wait to be assessed again. There were currently 17 schools within the Borough that required improvement, of the 17, and 9 of these were expected to be assessed

imminently. It was therefore important to recognise that only a small number of schools would have to improve for the Borough to be in line with the national average.

A Member asked what support children were getting who were classed as having SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) or were under an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) as the report showed that educational outcomes for these children were lower than that of their peers. The Director for Access and Inclusion responded that SEND/EHCP was the responsibility of the school and this would involve putting a plan in place for the child which could require provision from partners. In addition, the Local Authority School Improvement Grant funding had been re-delegated by the Schools Forum and the Council had powers of intervention with Schools rated as 'Inadequate' or 'Requires Improvement' to help them improve.

In response to a question from a Member on the governments Covid recovery grant the Director for Access and Inclusion informed Members that these grants were directly provided to schools and that the government had created a national tutoring programme. Due to the funding being provided to schools directly from the Department for Education, the Council had no oversight of the spending of this money from the grant. However, the Council still had oversight regarding schools that were causing concern. The Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills added that he was working for one of these tutoring programmes and explained that it was for schools to decide where the need was in terms of educational outcomes since the Pandemic. Furthermore, the data led approach of the Council would help, especially in regard to early year's education, to determine why there were disparities in educational outcomes and how these could be addressed.

In response to a Member question the Director for Access and Inclusion informed the Committee that the Council carried out a programme called 'Schools Causing Concern Policy'. The Council looked at various parts of a schools work to determine if it needed more support and ranked schools within the Borough on a matrix.

Resolved:

1. That the Committee recognise the improving picture of Ofsted gradings in Walsall Schools.
2. That the Committee note the differing attainment results and the specific challenges facing Walsall children, particularly at the Early Years Foundation Stage.

48/22 Schools White Paper, Schools Bill and Education Investment Areas

The Chair invited the Director for Access and Inclusion to introduce the report.

The Director for Access and Inclusion highlighted the salient points of the report including that the Schools Bills was no longer going ahead [annexed]. However, some aspects of the Bill would be continuing; such as the work on school attendance, the national funding formula and Education Investment

Area. The Council would be implementing the national funding formula by the year 2023/25 and the Council aimed to challenge its performance and create a culture of raising standards. The Council was also offering schools access to the 'World Education Forum' and was aiming to build on its partnership work.

A Member asked if any mainstream schools within the Borough was open under the 32.5 hour a week minimum. The Director for Access and Inclusion responded that no school was currently under the 32.5 week minimum.

A Member asked what constituted as an 'excellent teacher' as found within the Schools White Paper. The Director for Access and Inclusion responded that all teachers were measured against the teaching standards framework. There was support for teachers through the teaching schools and new early teaching careers pathways.

A Member asked why being part of the 'World Education Forum' was not standard practice for schools. The Director for Access and Inclusion explained to the Committee that it was up to teaching staff to decide to be involved.

A Member asked if the Council was doing anything to help retain teaching staff. The Director for Access and Inclusion responded that the Borough was not experiencing a loss of many teaching staff. In addition, the Council was running a teaching recruitment pool and a headteacher support unit was being run by schools. The Executive Director for Children's and Customer added that there was currently strong competition for Newly Qualified Teaching positions in Walsall.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

49/22 Update on Children's Strategic Alliance and Walsall Learning Alliance (WR4C)

The Chair invited the Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills to introduce the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills highlighted the salient points of the report [annexed]. The Director for Access and Inclusion added that to build on the partnership work of the Council it had been decided to relaunch the Walsall Learning Alliance with an independent chair. In addition, the aim of the Children's Strategic Alliance was to engage with key partners to identify and focus on the improvements, and to put children at the centre of decision making.

A Member asked whether any young adults were part on the board of the Children's Strategic Alliance. The Director for Access and Inclusion responded that there were young adults on the board however there were still

improvements to be made in gathering the experiences of young people. In addition, the Council sent out surveys to young people and, but the Council needed to do more to capture the voice of young people with SEND.

Resolved

That the Committee support the work the Council was undertaking with partners through the development of a Walsall Children and Young People Strategic Alliance, and Walsall Learning Alliance, to secure better outcomes for children growing up in Walsall.

50/22 Corporate Financial Performance 2022/23 – 7 month position ended 31 October 2022

The Chair invited the Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills to introduce the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills highlighted the salient points of the report [annexed]. The Finance Business Partner for Children Services then explained the appendixes of the report.

There were no further discussion on the item.

Resolved

1. That the Committee the forecast 2022/23 year-end financial position for the Council as a whole be noted.
2. That the Committee and commented on the forecast 2022/23 year-end financial position for services within the remit of this Committee be noted.

51/22 Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2023/24 – 2026/27

The Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills gave a brief introduction to the report and highlighted the salient points. He highlighted £4.7m of investment and cost pressures, the saving proposals, and the proposed draft capital programme spending.

The Finance Business Partner for Children's Services (Access and Inclusion & Admin Hub) outlined briefly what each attached appendix showed.

There were no further discussion on the item.

Resolved

1. That the Committee the draft revenue budget proposal attached that related to the remit of the Committee as show in Appendices 1 and 2 be noted.
2. That the Committee the draft capital schemes included in the draft capital programme attached that related to the remit of the Committee as shown in Appendices 3 and 4 be noted.

52/22 Recommendation Tracker

The Chair invited the Democratic Services Officer to update the Committee on the recommendation tracker.

Resolved

That the Committee the Recommendation Tracker be noted.

53/22 Areas of Focus

The Chair invited the Democratic Services Officer to update the Committee on the Areas of Focus. The Democratic Services Officer informed the Committee of the items on the areas of focus scheduled for the next two meetings and asked the Director of Access and Inclusion to expand on these.

The Director of Access and Inclusion informed the Committee that the topic 'Children not in School (Revisited)' would include a report containing information on Attendance and Exclusions, Children Missing Education, Elective Home Education and Fair Access Protocol. There would also be an update report on the Vulnerable Learners Hub. In addition, for the Committee meeting in March the 'SEND (Revisited)' topic would include a report on: Accelerated Progress Plan Update, New SEND Development Framework, Special School Provision Plan Update including information on the modelling process.

Resolved

That the following items be included on the work programme:

- a. Attendance and Exclusions, Children Missing Education Elective Home Education, Fair Access Protocol report
- b. Update on the Vulnerable Learners Hub
- c. Accelerated Progress Plan Update
- d. New SEND Development Framework report
- e. Special School Provision Plan Update

54/22 Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was scheduled for the 16 February 2023.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 19:59.