

**EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY 8 SEPTEMBER, 2015 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE**

**Committee Members Present** Councillor E. Hazell (Vice Chair in the Chair)  
Councillor R. Burley  
Councillor A. Ditta  
Councillor M. Follows  
Councillor T. Jukes  
Councillor G. Perry  
Councillor D. Shires  
Councillor S. Wade  
Councillor T. Wilson

**Portfolio Holders** Councillor C. Towe (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships)

**Non elected non voting Members present** R. Bragger (Primary Teacher Representative)  
P. Welter (Secondary Teacher Representative)

**Officers Present** Lynda Poole – Assistant Director (Access and Achievement)  
Tony Griffin - Interim Assistant Director (Children's Social Care)  
Frances Done – Independent Chair (Walsall Education Challenge Board)  
Lloyd Haynes - Senior Finance Manager  
Ian Cruise – Taylor - Youth Support Services Delivery Manager  
Neil Picken – Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager

**Also Present** Mr Stephen-Pritchard Jones – Headteacher – The Shepwell School

506/15 **APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor A. Kudhail.

507/15 **SUBSTITUTIONS**

None.

**508/15    DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

**509/15    LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

There were no agenda items that required the exclusion of the public.

**510/15    MINUTES**

Members considered the minutes of the meetings held on 23 June, 2015.

**Resolved:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 June, 2015, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

**511/15    YOUTH SERVICE PROVISION WORKING GROUP**

The Committee considered a report tabled at the meeting [annexed] which detailed the work of the working group together with a number of recommendations.

The Lead Member introduced the report advising that the Working Group had met on 27<sup>th</sup> July and 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2015 to consider the following:-

- The creation of a Youth Mutual which would develop links with the 3rd sector and 'dovetail' with the review of youth services;
- Work being proposed to be carried out to utilise existing buildings – schools/libraries/leisure centres etc to deliver youth services (Sefton Model);
- How funding can be spent at a local level to ensure that 'need' is addressed whilst allowing flexibility to direct support which is best suited to each locality.

Consideration was also given to new initiatives such as a introducing 'Youth Zones' which maximise the use of leisure facilities by offering discounted sessions purely for young people. A further initiative discussed was introducing the organisation 'On-Side' to Walsall which draws from a wide range of funding streams to provide a purpose built facility with numerous activities for young people. This is due to be implemented in Wolverhampton in early 2016.

The Portfolio Holder was asked to provide clarity on the charity 'On Side'. He advised that 'Youth Zone' buildings are designed to give young people aged 8–19 years old (25 for those with a disability) somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to in their leisure time; occupying their bodies and minds with fun activities, learning new skills and socialising in a safe, positive way. He also made it clear that it was his wish that such an initiative, if introduced, would not detract or

take funding away from the existing youth work budget. Clarity was given on funding arrangements and the Committee were advised that the Council would be required to identify and make available a suitable site and provide £3 million, for the capital aspects of the project, while 'On Side' would provide a further £3 million. The Council would be required to commit funding of £400,000 per year for a 3 year period. During this period 'On Side' would commit £500,000 with contributions from local businesses and young people's membership and usage fees generating £100,000 per year.

A Committee Member queried whether a new town centre building for the provision would affect funding for the 'Myplace' building. The Portfolio Holder advised that 'Myplace' would not be affected.

A Committee Member raised concern that local young people were being denied access to 'Myplace'. The Portfolio Holder advised that this was not his understanding. The Youth Support Services (YSS) Delivery Manager endorsed the view. All Members were asked to advise the YSS Delivery Manager where there was a perceived issue so that he could investigate the issues and respond to them in briefing note.

Members considered the suggested resource allocation model which set out three options which each contained a level (differentiated between each option) of weighting based on need (noting this was distinct from deprivation) as previously assessed against the levels of teenage conception, youth crime, incidences of youth related anti-social behaviour and numbers of young people not in education, employment or training. Members of the Committee recommended that option B should be supported.

In terms of the options for surplus centres, it was highlighted by a Committee Member that Pelsall Youth Centre was owned by the church trustees and so may not be available for sale.

### **Resolved:**

1. That Area Partnerships are consulted during November, 2015 to identify which of the two commissioning decision making processes they would wish to implement in their areas;
2. That Cabinet be advised that the Working Group recommend that option B of the resource allocation model be adopted;
3. That Cabinet be advised that the working group have concern in relation to the options proposed by the Development and Delivery Team to dispose of surplus centres and suggest that every effort is made to discuss options for the sites with partners during the commissioning process to keep options open;
4. That the Portfolio Holder (Learning Skills and Apprenticeships) continues to meet with the organisation 'On-Side' to discuss the feasibility of introducing a purpose built youth facility in Walsall. The working group ask that the Portfolio

Holder provide a report to a future meeting of the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the outcome of any discussions;

5. That Cabinet explore the possibility of introducing 'Youth Zones' in leisure centres to assist in maximising the use of leisure facilities by offering discounted sessions purely for young people.
6. That the YSS Delivery Manager provides a briefing paper on access to Myplace by local young people.

#### 512/15     **PETITION TO SAVE ALDRIDGE MANOR YOUTH CENTRE**

The committee considered a report [annexed] setting out a response to a petition received to "keep Aldridge Manor House Youth Centre open as opposed to closing it in December, 2015. For the Council to effectively engage with young people, parents and interested members of the community to agree, and to arrange for it to be run and developed by the Aldridge community in a more cost effective and sustainable manner".

The Portfolio Holder (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships) advised that significant consultation and engagement with young people and the community had taken place over a number of years to identify an alternative venue, however, none of those identified had been suitable. He confirmed that given the unprecedented budget pressures the site was still identified for disposal.

A number of Committee Members expressed concern at the loss of such a facility and stated that more should be done to promote the activities at the centre as it was felt that this was lacking. It was also stated that the building was underused following a decision to take out council staff that were previously based there.

A Committee Member stated that there were several sites which had not been considered previously. The Committee considered that the council could support the youth centre by using funding to help pay for rent, should the facility be taken over by another provider.

In terms of the third sector taking greater responsibility for the delivery of youth support services, it was noted that there was a review of Walsall Voluntary Action being undertaken and the Chair requested that the final report be shared with Members of the Committee.

#### **Resolved:**

That the final report of the review of Walsall Voluntary Action be circulated to Members of the Education and Children's Services Committee.

Members received a presentation from the Headteacher of The Shepwell School.

Mr Pritchard-Jones advised that the school had a budget of £500,000 per year and employed 17 staff. The school served the whole of Walsall providing short stay provision for up to 36 pupils that were unable to attend mainstream schools. It did so using:-

- On site provision at the school premises;
- Home schooling;
- A classroom at the Manor Hospital.

An explanation of the type of pupil catered for was provided which included children with mental health issues and expectant mothers of school age. Members were informed that the school had received an overall rating of 'Good' by Ofsted in November, 2014 and that attainment was high. The school worked hard to improve attendance and currently held an attendance rate of 92% which was significantly higher when compared to the average when the children were at mainstream schools. This was important when pupils were reintegrated into mainstream schools.

In terms of challenges it was highlighted that budgets were tight. This was exacerbated as some Headteachers would not release pupil premium funding to The Shepwell School when a pupil transferred. Mr Pritchard advised that he was working with schools to try and improve partnership arrangements.

The location of the school was not ideal although behaviour and safety of pupils had received a rating of "outstanding" by Ofsted.

In closing, Mr Pritchard-Jones advised that he was happy to receive visitors and suggested that Members contact him should they wish to visit.

A discussion ensued regarding the issue of funding. It was Members view that funding should follow the child when they are enrolled at The Shepwell School. It was also asked how many pupils 'slip through the net' - neither in mainstream school or The Shepwell School. Mr Pritchard -Jones advised that it was difficult to say but in 2014 home schooling staff identified 2 individuals.

The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) advised that it was critical that an inclusion strategy was in place so that young people do not slip through the net. The Admissions team were effective and identified issues as and when they arose. The Scrutiny Committee had previously established a working group to review elective home education and found that the service was supportive and well informed.

In terms of funding, the Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) advised that the Council was acutely aware that changes were required. The Inclusion Strategy was being reviewed and would be brought to Scrutiny in future. The funding formula was also being reconsidered to ensure that funding follows the child. This would be considered by Schools Forum in October 2015 and then the Education Funding Agency before being implemented for the next financial year.

A Committee Member asked what assistance was given to the school to help young people from Shepwell to get into further education. In response, Mr Pritchard-Jones advised that at the start of year 11, robust monitoring took place to establish what the young people wanted. This had previously been carried out 'in-house' but recently they had been working with YSS. The Adult Community College now sent representatives to build relationships with students to prepare them for the transfer from school to further education. Walsall College had a separate referral process. Overall, children's services had been very supportive.

The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) advised that 14-19 strategy had been re-established. Work was undertaken with the Education Business Partnership to develop pathways. Relationships were also being developed with universities.

A discussion was held regarding the cost of transportation for pupils attending The Shepwell School. The Committee were advised that in previous years the transportation budget had been high. In 2010 taxi costs had been £64,000. A lot of work had been carried out to reduce costs. Pupils were encouraged to use public transport and provided with funded bus passes. This has reduced costs significantly to £4,000 in the 2014/15 financial year.

### **Resolved**

**That the Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) advise Schools Forum that the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee support the work being undertaken within Children's Services to amend the funding formula in respect of Pupil Premium.**

### **514/15 PROCEDURAL NOTE**

The Chair sought Committees approval to consider items 9 (Education Challenge Board) & 10 (Spotlight on School Improvement) together as they were interconnected.

### **Resolved**

That items 9 (Education Challenge Board) and item 10 (Spotlight on School Improvement) be considered together.

### **515/15 EDUCATION CHALLENGE BOARD/SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

The Chair welcomed Frances Done, Independent Chair of the Walsall Education Challenge Board to the meeting.

The Committee then considered the report {annexed} which provided an update on the overview of the progress made against priorities 1 & 2 of the School Improvement Strategy Action Plan and received evidence from Frances Done.

Areas highlighted included:-

- Assurance that good progress had been made over the last 9 months, however, it was important to remember that it would take time as the situation could not be turned round overnight;
- The development of a performance scorecard to measure performance. This had been revisited to set more realistic targets. Results would be monitored every two months and relationships with schools had improved;
- Work had been undertaken with Academy Sponsors to improve relationships and the performance of Academies;
- A permanent appointment had been made to the Head of Service (Lynda – which one?);
- The fact that leadership was judged to be good or better by Ofsted in 79.3% of Walsall schools.

A Committee Member asked what work was being undertaken with parents as often initiatives were implemented by the school which were not supported. The Portfolio Holder (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships) agreed that parents needed to take more responsibility for their children's education and this will be pursued in coming months.

The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) advised that a numeracy and literacy strategy had been implemented across the borough that tried to engage parents. It was important to engage families with activities such as sports events and school plays to develop a relationship which can then move onto numeracy and literacy.

The Independent Chair advised that it was crucial to develop these relationships when a child was young. The Early Help Strategy identifies those children who need support to access the same opportunities as their peers. Research had proven that, when combined with a multi-agency approach, this practice works.

A Member stated that good practice from headteachers was required as this seemed to differ across the borough. Some heads would ensure they were on the school gate in the morning and after school. Others were invisible and required appointments to be made should Councillors wish to speak with them. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) agreed that consistency at senior level was important. It was also important that school governors were effective in holding headteachers to account and driving initiatives.

A Committee Member asked whether there were difficulties in recruiting to senior positions within schools. The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) advised that the position had improved recently. A year ago only 1 to 2 applications were typically received for headteacher posts. This had now increased to around 6 - 8 applications per vacancy. It was believed that the reputation of Walsall was improving and a workforce strategy was being developed.

A Committee Member asked what had happened to sport in schools such as having teams and events as this appeared to differ across the borough? The Assistant

Director (Access and Achievement) advised that the Government had an initiative 4 years ago which injected money into schools for sports co-ordinators. When this funding ceased, the ability to deliver was weakened. It was highlighted that schools had a statutory role to provide 7 hours of sports per week although this was problematic in some schools due to timetabling. Some schools did pay for external companies to deliver sports activities during lunch.

A Committee Member stated that schools were becoming more pressurised and target driven which meant that time to provide sports was limited. This view was supported by another Member who stated that, given the increased pressure, it was also difficult to develop good relationships with students.

### **Resolved**

That the progress made in relation to priorities 1 and 2 of the School Improvement Action Plan, be noted.

### **516/15 FOSTERING AND ADOPTION WORKING GROUP**

The Committee considered the final report of the Fostering and Adoption Working Group [annexed].

Members commented that the review was a good example of effective scrutiny and supported the recommendations contained within the report. The Interim Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) also commented that the review was helpful from an officer perspective and thanked the Committee for commissioning it.

A question was raised in relation to the issuing of passports for looked after children. The Interim Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) advised that he would provide a briefing note to Members on this issue.

Members suggested that the Working Group appoint further Members and continue to meet to monitor progress on the recommendations.

### **Resolved:**

1. That the final report and recommendations of the Fostering and Adoption Working Group be approved for submission to Cabinet;
2. That an update on the recommendations be considered at a meeting of the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November, 2015;
3. That Councillor R. Burley and E. Hazell be appointed to the Fostering and Adoption Working Group.



## 517/15 CHILDRENS HOME VISITS

Members considered a briefing note [annexed] seeking the nomination of 5 members to undertake a programme of visits to Children's Homes.

### **Resolved:**

**That the following Members be appointed to undertake visits to Children's Homes:-**

- **Councillor T. Wilson (Bluebells)**
- **Councillor R. Burley (Redruth)**
- **Councillor E. Hazell (Lichfield Road)**
- **Councillor S. Wade (Hilton Road)**
- **Councillor T. Jukes (Spindletree)**

## 518/15 QUARTERLY FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Committee received a report [annexed] summarising the pre-audit revenue and capital outturn position for the year ended 31 March 2015, subject to external audit and an update on the financial position for 2015/16 (based on the performance for the 2 months to May 2015), for services within the remit of the Committee.

The Chair and other Members sought clarity in relation to the number of Looked After Children (LAC) as it was clearly a budget pressure which was overspent year on year. In particular, it was asked why the budget was not amended to reflect the numbers of LAC, rather than setting unrealistic targets which could not be met. It was also asked why MOSAIC was significantly overspent.

The Senior Finance Manager advised that the MOSAIC system took longer to implement than initially anticipated which led to increased costs. The project was a joint initiative between children's services and adult social care. Adult social care had received a grant which had allowed for a re-alignment of budgets which meant there was no longer a pressure in children's services.

In terms of the number of LAC there had been a drive previously to reduce the numbers and make savings, however, the number remained around 620 and appeared to be stabilizing at that level. But savings were still required to be made in this area. The Senior Finance Manager advised that a great deal of work was being undertaken to mitigate costs. The Council budget as a whole was being re-considered in the medium term to address how each directorate was funded.

A Committee Member asked why agency staff, which were costly, were still being employed in children's services. The Interim Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) advised that appointing agency staff was often the only way of ensuring people with sufficient experience were undertaking roles. In order to encourage permanent employees, the rate of pay for agency staff was being capped which was beginning to have an effect.

In terms of recruiting permanent staff, market supplements were offered and numerous campaigns were run. A number of appointments had been made but many were newly qualified social workers which limited the role they could undertake in the short term. There was competition for staff and Birmingham offered a substantial figure as a 'golden hello' which was a draw for many applicants.

The Senior Finance Manager advised that the Council was in the midst of a review of employment terms and conditions. A recent round of interviews resulted in 8 applicants deciding against the role within Initial Response Service as there was uncertainty around levels of salary and other factors currently out for consultation.

**Resolved:**

1. That the pre-audit 2014/15 year end financial position for services under the remit of the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, being a revenue overspend against budget of **£2.692m** (net of use of earmarked reserves and carry forwards), and a capital under spend of **£0.011m** (net of approved carry forwards into 2015/16) be noted;
2. That the forecast 2015/16 year end financial position for services under the remit of the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, is a revenue overspend against budget of **£3.110m** and a capital overspend of **£0.554m** be noted.

519/15     **AREAS OF FOCUS AND FORWARD PLANS**

Members considered the Areas of Focus and Forward Plans of the Council and the Black Country Executive Joint Committee.

Committee Members recommended that Child Sexual Exploitation, an update on the re-organisation of children's centres and Special Educational Needs Review be considered at a future meeting.

**Resolved:**

That the following items be considered at a future meeting:-

- Child Sexual Exploitation;
- Re-organisation of children's centres;
- Special Educational Needs Review

xxx/15     **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was noted as 13 October, 2015.

The meeting terminated at 8.30 p.m.

Chair: .....

Date:.....