

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 5 JANUARY, 2016 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Committee Members Present	Councillor R. Burley (Chair) Councillor E. Hazell (Vice Chair) Councillor A. Ditta Councillor M. Follows Councillor T. Jukes Councillor A. Kudhail Councillor D. Shires Councillor T. Wilson
Portfolio Holders Present	Councillor E. Hughes (Care and Safeguarding) 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	David Haley - Director (Children's Services) Lynda Poole – Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) Debbie Carter - Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) Sue Morgan - Group Manager (Early Intervention and family support) Carol Williams - Head of Programme Delivery Jane Bonner - Head of Service for School Improvement Alan Michell - Head of Service Neil Picken – Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager

546/16 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor G. Perry, Councillor S. Wade and Mr S. Raynor.

547/16 **SUBSTITUTIONS**

The Senior Committee Business and Governance Manager advised that Councillor E. Russell was substituting for Councillor S. Wade.

548/16 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

Councillor R. Burley declared a non pecuniary interest in agenda item 8 – Proposed Primary School Expansions – School Capacity - as she was a Governor at Salisbury Primary School which had been considered as part of the school expansion programme.

Councillor Dittah declared a non pecuniary interest in item 12 – Children’s Centres/Locality Working – as he is Chair of the Management Committee.

549/16 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

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

550/16 **MINUTES**

Members considered the minutes of the meeting held on 24 November, 2015.

Councillor Ditta requested that it be recorded that he had declared a non pecuniary interest as he is Chair of the Management Committee.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 November, 2015, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record subject to the following amendment to minute 535/15:-

Councillor Ditta declared a non pecuniary interest as Chair of the Management Committee of Palfrey Community Association.

551/16 **WORKING WITH ACADEMIES**

The Chair welcomed Dame Maureen Brennan to the meeting and invited her to address the committee.

Dame Brennan thanked the Chair and provided an overview of the work of the Matrix Academy Trust for which she was Executive Headteacher and a Director. The Committee were advised that the Trust had responsibility for:-

- Bloxwich Academy

- Barr Beacon School
- Etone College

It was highlighted that the Trust also offered school centred initial teacher training, based at Barr Beacon. It was also highlighted that the Evolve Teaching School Alliance based at Barr Beacon had been selected to become a National Teaching School. This offered a network that collaborates effectively to share first hand outstanding training and practice on a wide spectrum in a variety of different specialisms.

The point was made that the Trust had an overall objective to help every child achieve the best they can.

The Committee heard that since becoming responsible, all the schools within the Trust had improved. Barr Beacon was outstanding when previously a failing school and the Etone College had been lifted from Special Measures.

In terms of support, members were advised that it differed dependent on the circumstances of the school. Each school joining the Matrix Academy Trust would be thoroughly scrutinised at every layer to identify any issues.

At Etone College, leadership support was provided and changes made to provide overcapacity in terms of staffing. The Governing Body, which was appointed by the Trust rather than school, was very strong and chaired by a National Leader of Governance. Further support from the Local Authority was provided in relation to admissions and exclusions. It was explained that strengths within each school differed and so each was used to help and support others which improve all schools as a group.

It was emphasised that the Trust was less complex than larger organisations and so people were given responsibility and held accountable – this applied both to staff and pupils.

The Chair sought clarity as to the role of the Local Authority with Academies, particularly as some Academies were not performing and would not allow access. In reply, Mo Brennan clarified that Academies were not obliged to allow the Local Authority access, however, she felt it would benefit them to do so with certain matters. It was highlighted that this was not the case for every element of the Local Authority services but was beneficial in certain areas such as leadership training.

The Portfolio Holder - Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships advised that the Local Authority needed to develop and maintain working relationships with Academies. He advised that he, together with Director (Children's Services) held discussions with the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) regarding underperforming Academies and those unwilling to engage. The role of Commissioner was fairly remote as he had the whole of the West Midlands to cover. He expressed concern that in the future there would not be a role for the Local Authority in education.

A Committee member shared the concern that more schools were being turned into Academies. Some were already underperforming although it was accepted that

others were performing well. It was particularly worrying when schools were pressurised into converting and not given a choice in terms of Sponsors.

Discussion followed on the ability of schools, whether Academies or otherwise, to attract quality teaching staff. Mo Brennan advised that they grew their own staff as trainee teachers which were then offered full time employment within one of the schools within the cluster. This way of training provided more time within a school setting than the traditional PGCE route. Trainees also received payment through a government grant. Reference was again made to overstaffing schools to ensure that agency staff were not required as this was more cost effective.

A Member asked how quickly improvements would be seen at recently converted schools such as Bloxwich Academy. Mo Brennan advised that it was difficult to say. She advised that it took 3 to 4 years for improvements to embed at Barr Beacon. It was now an outstanding school and a lot of hard work took place to keep it at that level. At Bloxwich it was clear that expectations were not high and this needed to be addressed. More students had gone to university from Bloxwich during the last year than ever before. Young pregnancy was an issue at the school and it would take time for initiatives to address this to be embedded. Efforts were being made to raise pupil perceptions and self esteem such as a trip to London. In closing, Members were advised that on 120 pupils had expressed a preference to attend Bloxwich which was very low. That said, she believed, with the support of parents, the school could be outstanding in future. Changes were beginning to take place and have impact including the successful recruitment of a permanent Headteacher.

The Chair returned to the issue of contact and engagement and asked what barriers could be in place that prevented improved relations between the Local Authority and Academies. The Local Authority was keen to improve all schools whether Academies or not which required joined up working between the two.

The Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) advised that some Sponsored Academies had been instructed not to engage with the Local Authority as they were the Accountable Body. Despite this, every effort was being made to improve the relationship with Academies and progress was being made. Sector led improvement was the most effective model to improve education and it was important to have high expectations and a consistent approach.

Dame Mo Brennan advised that some Trusts were large organisations and operated in a number of areas which made dealing with each individual Local Authority more complex. This was exacerbated as Policies and Procedures in each Authority could be different.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that the Council has a pro active approach to engagement with all schools, whether Academies or under the control of the Council. He was due to meet with the regional ofsted lead HMCI and the RSC in a few weeks to ensure that all involved were working together, effectively, at a strategic level.

The Chair thanked Dame Mo Brennan for her attendance.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

552/16 FOCUSED DEBATE ON PRIORITY 1 & 2 OF THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN

The Committee considered a report [annexed] which provided an update of the actions taken on priorities 1 and 2 of the School Improvement Action Plan.

The Portfolio Holder (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships) provided an update on the current position and confirmed the commitment to ensure that all schools would be good or outstanding by 2020.

The Head of Service for School Improvement advised that there had been a shift from the Council providing services to schools providing each other with challenge and support to improve. Sector led improvement was very important and the Council put in systems to support this process. The Council also identified and shared successes within schools.

In relation to Priority 1, a Member questioned whether weak school leadership had been removed to eradicate inadequate leadership. It was confirmed that every effort was made to identify and support individuals to improve in the first instance. Two high performing head teachers had been seconded to develop a leadership strategy. Only when training and support wasn't successful people had been released. In the last 12 months 3 people had been released which included those with governance responsibilities.

In terms of Governors, there were 4 vacancies. It was explained that recruitment of Governors had changed and it was much more about skills and knowledge rather than who they represented. A number of Governance arrangements had been re-constituted whilst others had been reduced in size. A skills audit was undertaken each year to identify any specific gaps on governing bodies. In addition, a number of targeted recruitment drives had been undertaken to recruit individuals with specific skills, such as finance. The next recruitment drive would focus on individuals from the business community.

The Chair stated that whilst it was important to appoint Governors with the right skill set, it was equally important to remember that they were volunteers who gave up their time to support and improve schools. A further Member stated that individuals may have un-definable qualities which couldn't be quantified or fit into the specific skills required but were very effective in their roles.

A member referred to paragraph 1.12 of the report which highlighted that RAG ratings of governance across Walsall based on governing body minutes and some reviews of governance show that 56% are rated green and 12% red. The Portfolio Holder (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships) explained that the manager responsible for improving governing bodies was committed to doing so and had re-evaluated work streams to give this matter priority. The Head of Service for School

Improvement advised that the aim was to improve matters so that no school governance arrangements were rated as red. An action plan was in place to offer challenge and support to schools followed up by regular monitoring. The Member asked for timescales for improvement to which the Head of Service advised that there was a need to be realistic and assured Members that every effort was made to bring about the improvement in those schools which were currently rated as red.

It was asked, in relation to Priority 2, whether any LA Maintained school or sponsored Academy had been judged to be in an Ofsted category 4 given that the success criteria stated that no school would be in this category by July, 2015. It was confirmed that no schools had entered this category in the last year.

In closing, the Chair requested that feedback be provided to Members on the relationships between the Council and Academies, following the introduction of the draft protocol for working with Academies.

Resolved:

That feedback is provided to Members on the relationships between the Council and Academies, following the introduction of the draft protocol for working with Academies.

553/16 PROPOSED PRIMARY SCHOOL EXPANSIONS – SCHOOL CAPACITY

The Portfolio Holder (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships) presented a report [annexed] which explained the purpose of the school estate in Walsall and sets out the principles that underpin the approach to managing the estate.

In presenting the report he advised that Kings Hill, a school which was identified for expansion, was expected to be lifted out of Special Measures at the next imminent inspection.

The Chair criticised the content of the report commenting that it lacked substance and detail. In particular, there was no detail as to the allocation process and rationale for the decisions made to shortlist the four schools. It was questioned whether the schools were in the right areas to meet the demand of an increasing population. The inclusion of a map would have been helpful. This view was supported by a number of Committee members. The Chair stated that these points should be addressed before submission to Cabinet for a decision.

The Portfolio Holder (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships) advised that the method used was tried and tested and used every year.

The Head of Service apologised that the report was not as expected by Members. He agreed to circulate a map to Members of the Committee. He advised that Walsall was split into 11 areas for pupil planning. Demand for school places was calculated based on a number of criteria including:-

- expected demand,

- projected birth rates,
- Migration;
- Housing developments.

Based on the criteria 4 areas had been identified as requiring expansion. The 4 schools were within these areas. He advised that the report would be improved prior to submission to Cabinet.

The Chair referred to the comment made earlier by the Portfolio Holder (Learning, Skills and Apprenticeships) that Kings Hill would be lifted from Special Measures. In doing so, she confirmed that this was the Council's view as the school had not yet been inspected by Ofsted. It was, of course, hoped that the school had improved.

The Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that he would ensure that the updated Cabinet report would be circulated to Members once it was published. He advised that it was clear that the process followed could be reassessed in light of the comments made to ensure that the revised process included some political engagement within the Scrutiny Forum. He confirmed that the formal statutory notices had been issued.

The Chair queried the financial information which stated that Basic Need Funding could be used to support both Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) provision. It was also asked whether the allocated budget was purely for build costs. The Head of Service advised that the funding allocated for school enlargement costs was for building costs and associated fees and clarified that the money could be used to support both SEN and PRU provision.

Resolved

1. That the Head of Service update the report to ensure that the comments of Members are included when it is submitted to Cabinet for a decision: this to include:-
 - Clarity on the allocation process;
 - The rationale for the decisions made to identify the 4 schools;
 - Further financial detail.
 - A map showing the schools marked for expansion;
2. That the updated Cabinet report be circulated to Members of the Committee, once published.

554/16 MULTI AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB

The Portfolio Holder (Care and Safeguarding) introduced a report (annexed) which set out an overview of current work being undertaken in the Walsall Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), established on 12 October, 2015.

In doing so, it was highlighted that Health colleagues had now joined the Initial Response Service and were located with the team. This was crucial to ensure that

the time taken to progress a child protection concern was within a maximum of 2 hours. It was acknowledged that delays with the MOSAIC system had impacted on the MASH as dual systems were being operated. MOSAIC was now much more embedded which enabled the team to be more effective moving forwards.

The Chair referred Members to the number of referrals highlighting that despite there being an average of 160 referrals per week only 48 assessments were undertaken within the initial response service. The Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) advised that the teams had been using manual data as they were between systems which impacted on productivity. It was envisaged that this would improve when Mosaic was more embedded.

It was explained that the MASH was still in its infancy and every effort was being made to ensure that data was monitored thoroughly to ensure that the right children were being provided with a social care service. A dedicated Probation Officer had been linked to the MASH and all within the team were being trained in the methodology of screening domestic violence referrals to ensure consistency. The MASH at Walsall was well regarded by other Authorities who had expressed an interest in learning from its implementation and operation.

Resolved

That the update be noted.

555/16 MOSAIC – THE REPLACEMENT SOCIAL CARE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Portfolio Holder (Care and Safeguarding) introduced a report (annexed) which set out the progress and financial position of the Mosaic project.

The Committee were advised that the initial timescale for implementation was set when there was a need to ensure change was being implemented quickly. This timeframe was unachievable. Given this and the need to ensure that the transfer of data from one system to another was safe, the project had run over both in terms of budget and time.

The Head of Programme Delivery explained that the system went live on 23 November, 2015. Over 700 staff now accessed the system and significant training had been provided. Whilst the implementation had taken longer, Members were reminded that the previous system, PARIS, had been used for over 10 years which made the transition more challenging. Staff had worked incredibly hard to ensure that Mosaic was user friendly and tailored to Walsall. The next stage was to migrate closed files from the PARIS system to Mosaic. It was crucial that this data was 'clean' and that data was stored in the correct place. All Members of the Committee were invited to visit the Project team should they wish to see and learn more about the system. In closing, it was stated that feedback from those using the system had been positive.

A Member congratulated staff for bringing the project back on track and stated that she had spoken with staff who reported that they were impressed with the new system. That said it was disappointing that scrutiny had been previously advised that the project was on track only to find that this wasn't the case. It was made clear that scrutiny should receive the facts in future and it was hoped that lessons had been learned.

Another Member queried whether there had been any disruption to the service during the transition phase. The Head of Programme Delivery provided assurance that there had not been any disruption with long term impact.

In closing, the Chair thanked the team for implementing the Mosaic system.

Recommended

That the update be noted.

556/16 CHILDREN'S POVERTY WORKING GROUP INITIATION DOCUMENT

Members considered the draft initiation document setting out the scope and objectives of the Child Poverty Working Group.

Resolved

That the initiation document be approved.

557/16 CHILDRENS CENTRES/LOCALITY WORKING

The Portfolio Holder (Care and Safeguarding) introduced a report (annexed) which provided an update on the Children's Centre Service.

The Group Manager (Early Intervention and family support) confirmed that there had a reduction of 14 centres leaving 4 within the Borough. Childcare had been transferred and so there was now a different type of provision in the remaining centres.

Members noted that engagement at centres had dropped. Officers advised that a performance dashboard was being developed to develop understanding around the types of engagement. The benchmark for engagement was 65% for good/outstanding centres and this was the aim. Members were informed that there had been a significant amount of change in terms of staffing which may have impacted on the level of engagement.

The Chair asked what Strategy was in place to increase the number of families accessing services. The Group Manager (Early Intervention and family support) advised that the Council held strong links with the Health service and were notified when children were born that would benefit from assistance. Once notified, an

outreach worker would make contact and offer help. A number of stay and play sessions were also offered which provided opportunity to engage with parents.

Consultation was taking place at a National Level on the future of Children’s Centres and a further change was anticipated. It was possible that a more targeted approach could be implemented. Within Walsall a locality model with co locations was envisaged for future provision.

Resolved

That the update be noted

558/16 YOUNG CARERS

Members considered a briefing note (annexed) which detailed the work undertaken by the Young Carers Partnership Group.

The Portfolio Holder (Care and Safeguarding) advised that advised the average age of a young carer was 12 years old. He asked Members to consider how difficult it must be for a child of that age to drift into a natural obligation to care for their parent(s). It was of the utmost importance that these children were not forgotten and were supported.

Resolved

That the briefing paper be noted.

559/16 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.

Resolved:

That the Areas of Focus and Forward Plans be noted.

560/16 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as 23 February, 2016.

The meeting terminated at 8.15 p.m.

Chair:

Date:.....