

# **Minutes of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Walsall Council House**

**Tuesday, 26 March 2024 at 6.00 PM**

## **Committee Members present:**

Councillor N. Latham (Chair)  
Councillor P. Kaur (Vice Chair)  
Councillor S. Hussain  
Councillor E. Morgan  
Councillor L. Rattigan  
Councillor G. Singh-Sohal

## **Portfolio Holder:**

Councillor M. Statham – Education

## **Officers Present:**

S. Kelly – Director (Access and Inclusion)  
R. Phillips – Head of Early Help, Family Support and Youth Justice  
I. Vanderheeren – Director of Early Help  
R. Beards – Head of Service (Inclusion)  
N. Perks – Quality Assurance Team Manager  
R. Thomas – Head of Access  
G. Aitkins – Practice Development Manager  
N. Gough – Democratic Services Officer

The Chair gave welcome and introductions.

63. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from K. Hinton, Councillor Gill, Councillor Ditta and Councillor Towe.

64. **Substitutions**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

65. **Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

66. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

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

67. **Minutes**

A copy of the Minutes of the meeting held on the 15 February 2024 were submitted [annexed].

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2024 a copy having previously been circulated, be approved, and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record. This was subject to the inclusion of Councillor Rattigan as declaring an interest as an employee of Walsall College at the previous meeting.**

68. **Early Years and Childcare Expansion Update**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report, and the Head of Access presented the salient points. The report provided an update on the Early Years and Childcare Expansion programme including the activities which have been undertaken and future planned activities. This was designed to increase capacity and enable parents to work through accessible childcare.

It was noted that in Walsall there was sufficiency of provision for Early Years and sufficient childcare across the Borough. There was an ambition to ensure that wrap-around provision was available for families, existing provision would be mapped, and gaps identified. Funding had been made available for this provision; Members were assured that this would be distributed equitably to providers.

In response to questions from a member, the Head of Access confirmed that the criteria for accessing 15 hours childcare was that families had to be working the equivalent of 16 hours a week. The Director (Access and

Inclusion) stated that more detailed information would be circulated. It was clarified that since the report was written, the delivery plan had been submitted to the Department of Education and subsequently approved.

## **Resolved**

**That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report, were supportive of the Early Years and Childcare Expansion programme and agree with the proposed activities and the approach to the programme.**

### **69. School Readiness and Early Years Foundation Stage Outcomes**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report, and the Quality Assurance Team Manager presented the salient points. The report provided an overview of the outcomes for children in Walsall, at the age of five years, based on the Early Years Profile Outcomes 2023. It described the current position regarding the Ofsted Grades of all providers for early years learning.

The Committee was advised that there had been an improvement in children's outcomes and in early years provision since the pandemic. The Service had worked with Billesley Research School on programmes aimed at reducing the gaps within Early Years. It was suggested that outcomes were already evident, and it was hoped this would continue into next year.

Inspection Outcomes in the Early Years Sector were described, and these were favourable compared to national. Assurance was provided that the Quality Assurance Team was working with providers to give support to improved ratings.

The Practice Development Manager stated that the Early Help Partnership and the Family Hubs Programme had a broad range of services for the 0-5 years age range. A key function of the Early Help Partnership was early intervention and support to families. There was a range of targeted and universal support provided, with further details provided on these. Walsall was one of 75 Local Authorities to receive funding to provide universal services through the family hubs – in particular, from pregnancy to 2 years old. Commissioned services for speech and language support were provided to ensure children received these services quickly. Future plans included working with health partners to expand the offer in Walsall.

Members commended the work being done, and Officers confirmed that toileting and sleep issues were focused on, the Director stated that schools and early years settings were providing a wealth of support but that it was important to support children before they came to the school settings.

The Director (Early Help) explained that health visitors were focusing on children born during covid who may not have been seen to ensure that they were school ready, in addition across the 4 localities partnership action

planning took place and allowed Partners to discuss concerns and emergent themes to create a priority plan.

A discussion was held on outcomes for boys with special educational needs, the importance of working with prospective parents to consider the plan for the child. The impact of the lockdown on key stage one children was acknowledged and the importance of improving this. The Director stated that early year's childcare in Walsall was of good quality and would help children to improve their social skills.

### **Resolved**

**That the Education Overview and Scrutiny committee noted the improvement in children's outcomes and in early years provision since the covid pandemic.**

## **70. Early Years and Special Educational Needs**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report, and the Head of Service (Inclusion) presented the salient points. The report provided an overview of the provisions of the SEND Code of Practice as they related to early years education, highlighting key practices that have been developed within Walsall to ensure young children with SEND received the support they needed from the earliest possible stage. The Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that Cabinet met the previous week and approved a £18.6 expansion plan at mainstream and specialist schools to increase the number of places.

The Head of Service stated that it was important to recognise that the number of children with special educational needs had doubled since 2023, and this early identification was a result of the clearing of a backlog, improved resources including a toolkit, and earlier identification of special educational needs to ensure children had the correct resources in place in educational settings. This was alongside a review of funding streams to ensure that the correct funding was being allocated in the correct setting. It was stressed that there was an expectation that settings were supporting children without Education Health and Care Plans but did have a special educational need.

The Health Gateway was a significant success and had a positive impact on the timeliness of assessments and had contributed to improvements. The 0 – 2 pathway would ensure more children were identified at an earlier stage.

Members commended this work, and the early identification of special educational needs. In response to questions, Officers confirmed that they were receiving positive feedback from Parents. Members were informed that Parent Groups had co-produced toolkits and services with professionals. It was stressed that in this instance the increase in the number of children with special educational needs was a positive as it meant that children's needs were identified at an earlier stage.

**Resolved**

**The Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the impact of the work carried out by the SEND Service including the developments specifically within early Years and the Education Health and Care Systems.**

**60. Recommendation Tracker**

The Committee received the tracker of recommendations from previous meetings, including progress made and outstanding items.

[Annexed]

**Resolved:**

That the recommendation tracker be noted.

**61. Areas of Focus**

**Resolved that:**

The Areas of Focus be noted.

**62. Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting will be agreed at annual council.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 18:56.

Signed:

Date: