

EDUCATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 14 October 2021 at 6.00 pm

In the Council Chamber at the Council House, Walsall

Committee Members present: Councillor K. Murphy (Vice-Chair in the Chair)
Councillor R. Burley
Councillor S. Elson
Councillor K. Ferguson
Councillor S. Johal
Councillor P. Kaur
Councillor K. Pedley (Substitute for Councillor E. Lee)
Councillor L. Rattigan

Portfolio Holders present: Councillor C. Towe – Education & Skills

Non-elected non-voting Members present: Ms S. Guy – Primary Teacher Representative

Officers present: Mrs S. Rowe, Executive Director – Children's Services
Mrs S. Kelly, Director – Access & Inclusion
Ms T. Pyatt, Head of Inclusion
Mr R. Thomas, Head of Access
Ms J. Kaur-Gill, Employment & Skills Manager
Mr K. Patel, Senior IAG Practitioner
Dr P. Fantom, Democratic Services Officer

39/21 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S. Ditta, L. Jeavons, E. Lee, S. Nasreen, and from Mrs P. Mullins.

The Vice-Chair informed the Committee that the Archbishop of Birmingham's representative, Mrs P. Mullins, had resigned from the Committee due to personal reasons. Members requested that a letter be sent to Mrs Mullins expressing the Committee's appreciation for her service since she joined the Committee in 2019.

40/21 SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor K. Pedley substituted for Councillor E. Lee.

41/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

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

42/21 LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)

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

43/21 MINUTES

A copy of the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021 was submitted [Annexed].

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

44/21 SPECIALIST PROVISION REVIEW UPDATE

A report was submitted to provide an update to the Committee on the review being undertaken of current provision for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Walsall. [Annexed].

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor C. Towe, introduced the report. He noted that specialist provision review would analyse current and future provision across the Borough for pupils with SEND. A specialist provision review group had been established, with a membership that included head teachers from nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, and it was to bring forward options and recommendations by spring 2022.

The Head of Inclusion, Ms T. Pyatt, summarised the report and explained the increases in the need for additional provision for children and young people with SEND to be provided. In terms of the shared vision of the participants of the review group, this was to enable children to attend a provision suitable for their needs and in line with the Walsall Right for Children agenda. The Head of Access, Mr R. Thomas, provided an outline of the position for the specialist review having regard to estate management. This noted that there would be consideration of the existing school provision, and whether additional places could be added through expansion/extension or additional assets be provided on satellite sites. Work was being undertaken with mainstream schools when there was additional capacity to have a hub that could be operated from within such schools.

Further to a question from Councillor Kaur concerning the training being provided to specialists to ensure children received the right level of support, Ms Pyatt explained the various types of support provided to all schools and settings. Work was being carried out in conjunction with the Educational Endowment Foundation to deliver programmes of training, development and support. The procurement of specialist services that would be available to support schools so that children and young people with SEND could remain in mainstream schools was also part of the review.

Councillor Burley raised the question of how the different needs existing within the 0 – 25 years age group could be met? She also referred to the exclusion of children with SEND who were attending mainstream rather than special schools, and highlighted the need for

there to be regular reports to the Committee on these issues. In response, Ms Pyatt referenced the Council's inclusion policy, and stated that if children had additional or special educational needs then it should be incorporated into the provision. When children were in the right place and receiving appropriate report, it was to be expected that the number of exclusions would fall. As part of the specialist provision review, work was being undertaken with nursery, primary, secondary and special school settings, with health professionals and the Children's Commissioner. She noted that, in terms of the extent of the age range, the Authority was concerned to ensure that young people were prepared for adult life. These points were supported by Councillor Towe, who emphasised the amount of work being carried out in all settings to recognise the needs of children in order to ensure they received an appropriate education.

Having regard to a question from Councillor Kaur on the funding and grants available, the Director – Access & Inclusion, Mrs S. Kelly, highlighted the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), high needs funding and pupil premium funding. She noted that there were additional grants and successful bids had been made regarding autism education training, grants to enable mental health support workers to work with schools, and for social workers to work with designated safeguarding leads in schools. Councillor Towe added that there was to be a significant increase in high needs funding next year, with new processes being introduced, and approval had been received from the Schools Forum.

Councillor Kaur also enquired about the reference in the report concerning the creation of budgetary pressures to be managed within the available funding envelope. Mrs Kelly pointed out that there had been a complete review of high needs funding, and that the new funding formula would allow needs to be met. In terms of capital pressures on the schools estate, there were options to determine whether what was held was sufficient.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

45/21 POST-16 EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS SUPPORT

A report was submitted to update the Committee on the current post-16 employment and skills support services in Walsall and the future resourcing of the services [Annexed].

Councillor Towe introduced this item by noting the decision in October 2020 to integrate the post-16 Information, Advice and Guidance team and the Education Business Partnership into the Employment and Skills team to create a more joined up and coherent education, employment and skills service to support both young people and older residents. This now totalled 28 employees, and was to be increased to 38 staff in the future. To support the work of schools, a more comprehensive offer for young people was being made via better employment engagement to prepare young people for work. Having regard to those young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), the career and enterprise company were supporting schools to work with pre- and post-16 year's young people. Councillor Towe also referred to the initiatives, such as Kick-start (which had been extended to March 2022), Black Country Impact and the drop-in centres at the Crossing, St Paul's Church, Walsall, and St John's Methodist Church, Bloxwich.

The Senior IAG Practitioner, Mr K. Patel, expanded on these points to provide more detail for the Committee, including Walsall Works, the links with other agencies and outreach delivery across the Borough. In particular, he noted that the statistics relating to NEETs in Walsall had been significantly lower than for those reported for the Authority's regional and national statistical neighbours.

Councillor Towe expressed his pride in what Walsall had achieved for its young people through such initiatives as Walsall Works, and he congratulated the officers for their work in helping the young people and residents in the Borough to obtain the skills that they needed to fulfil the opportunities available to them.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

46/21 WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2021/22

Members received the Committee's updated Work Programme [Annexed].

It was proposed that the item on the Walsall Right for Children programme, which had been due to be considered at this meeting, but which had been deferred owing to the Ofsted inspection, now be placed on the agenda for the March 2022 meeting.

The Democratic Services Officer, Dr P. Fantom, informed the Committee that due to staffing and resource constraints, it was considered necessary to pause the activities of the proposed working group initiated at the Committee's last meeting. This would be resumed once the constraints had been removed.

Resolved:

That subject to the above-mentioned amendments, the Work programme be approved.

47/21 FORWARD PLANS

Members received and considered the Forward Plans of the Council and the Black Country Executive Joint Committee [Annexed].

Resolved:

That the Forward Plans be noted.

48/21 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Thursday, 25 November 2021 at 6.00 pm.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 6.48 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....