

## **EDUCATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**19 JUNE 2018 AT 6.00 PM AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE, WALSALL**

<b>Committee Members present</b>	Councillor Aftab Nawaz (Chair) Councillor Sarah Jane Cooper (Vice-Chair) Councillor Daniel Barker Councillor Allah Ditta Councillor Brian Douglas-Maul Councillor Amers Kudhail Councillor Sally Neville Councillor Mark Statham Councillor Stephen Wade Councillor Vera Waters
<b>Portfolio Holders present</b>	Councillor Chris Towe – Education & Skills
<b>Non-elected voting Members present</b>	Ms Teresa Tunnell (Parent Governor)
<b>Non-elected non-voting Members present</b>	Mr Russ Bragger (Primary Teacher Representative) Ms Wendy Duffus (Secondary Teacher Representative)
<b>Officers present</b>	Ms Sally Rowe, Executive Director (Children’s Services) Ms Connie Beirne, Head of Service - Education Standards & Improvement Ms Joanne Golder, Senior Accountancy Officer Ms Jane Kaur-Gill, Employment & Skills Manager Mr Mohammed Irfan, Lead Accountant Mr Simon Tranter, Head of Regeneration & Development Dr Paul Fantom, Democratic Services Officer

### **1/18 WELCOME FROM THE CHAIR**

The Chair opened the Committee’s first meeting of the municipal year and welcomed all attendees. He highlighted the importance of this new Committee for the education of children and young people in the Borough. The Chair also emphasised that for the meetings to be efficient and effective, it was important that all Members read the papers prior to the meeting in order to formulate appropriate questions.

### **2/18 APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Lorna Rattigan.

### **3/18 SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillor Sally Neville substituted for Councillor Lorna Rattigan.

#### **4/18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

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

#### **5/18 LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985 (AS AMENDED)**

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

#### **6/18 CHANGE IN THE ORDER OF BUSINESS**

The Chair advised that items 7 and 8 would be considered as the next items of business by the Committee.

#### **7/18 CORPORATE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE – QUARTER 4 PRE-AUDIT OUTTURN POSITION FOR 2017/18**

The Committee considered a report [annexed] that gave the corporate financial position and was informed of the Children's Services pre-audit revenue and capital outturn position for 2017/18.

The Lead Accountant, Mr Mohammed Irfan, reported that the pre-audit revenue outturn for 2017/18 for the Children's Services Directorate was an over spend of £1.647m. Without the use of corporate and service reserves and implementation of the in-year action plan, the over spend would be £5.345m. He noted that since May 2018, the services within this Directorate had been split between the two new overview and scrutiny committees, and that for services under the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee the pre-audit revenue overspend was £280k. This was attributed to additional demand for home to school transport and pressures within the educational psychology service.

In response to a question from the Chair concerning the amount of money available for discretionary spending, Mr Irfan referred to table 5 in the report and advised that from a total of £99.632m there was £44.659m that went directly to schools.

Further to a question from a Member, and with reference to table 3 and the additional demands on services, Mr Irfan reported that a significant portion of the overspend in the Children's Services Directorate had occurred due to additional demand and associated placement costs in relation to Looked After Children.

A Member sought clarification on the costs of home to school transport. He requested information regarding how many children had been affected by the cuts to this service that had occurred over the last two years. The information being unavailable during the meeting, it was agreed that this would be circulated to Members before the next meeting.

It was noted by a Member that despite measures having been introduced to cut transport costs an overspend situation had continued, and the effectiveness of these measures was queried. Mr Irfan confirmed that there was an action plan for dealing with these financial pressures; however, this had not been fully in place at the commencement of the last financial year and this was reflected in the overspend position.

**Resolved:**

1. That the pre-audit revenue outturn for 2017/18 year end for services under the remit of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted;
2. That the pre-audit capital outturn for 2017/18 year end for services under the remit of the Children's Services Directorate Management Team be noted;
3. That the actions taken to address the areas of overspend be noted;
4. That the Lead Accountant provide the further information requested by Members in relation to the impact of the cuts to home to school transport during the last two years.

**8/18 PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION ATTAINMENT 2017**

A report on primary and secondary school results was submitted [annexed] that examined the performance of Walsall's children and young people when compared with their statistical neighbours and the national averages.

A Member having asked why there had been an increase in the attainment gap at Key Stage 2, the Head of Education Standards and Improvement, Ms Connie Beirne, pointed to changes that had been made which affected children's reading ages. She also referred to the support provided for complex needs and the strategies that had been put in place by schools. A bid had been made for support from the Strategic School Improvement Fund to support special needs education across the Black Country but this had been unsuccessful. In order to close the attainment gap, and in relation to the impact of Pupil Premium, head teachers were being held to account to ensure that children from lower income families were not disadvantaged and the Cohesion Team was working with children newly arrived in the Borough.

The Committee noted that had the report provided a comparison with national data in terms of SEN pupils and disadvantaged pupils, this would have helped Members in gaining an understanding of the reasons for the attainment gap. Ms Beirne pointed out that a breakdown of the results was provided in the executive summary but asserted that the results were variable across the country.

Members discussed the importance of raising primary and secondary standards to reach parity with national levels, the necessity of holding schools (and especially their head teachers and chairs of governors) to account and the role of this Committee in achieving this. Ms Beirne advised Members that data from other local authorities was being examined in this regard. She also noted that the former Education Childrens Board had now become the Walsall Strategic Inclusion Board.

Ms Beirne commented that a lot of training and other work had been undertaken with head teachers and school governing bodies regarding their accountability and governance. It was recognised that this would also make a contribution to the raising of attainment in primary, secondary and special schools.

The Executive Director, Ms Sally Rowe, stated her agreement with the remarks concerning improvements for the education of children and young people in the Borough. She stressed the importance of engagement between the Council and the schools, so that there was a shared ambition to raise aspiration. However, it was paramount that schools were held to account and it was an important part of Ofsted's role to improve their stability. Furthermore, Ms Rowe added that school governance was an area that the Committee might wish to consider and, through Member engagement, was one where Members could have a key role to play.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Chris Towe, reminded Members that many of the Borough's schools were now academies and were no longer under local authority control. However, he advised the Committee that it was intended to introduce timelines for use in conjunction with schools. The purpose of this was to facilitate the targeting of resources and to achieve more efficient working arrangements.

A Member expressed the view that children and young people should be well disciplined and appropriately prepared for the needs of industrial and other employers when entering the workplace. Other Members of the Committee stated that whilst there was accountability on head teachers and governing bodies, the situation was more complicated as whole structures were accountable in different ways. It was also recognised that schools were expected to be able to continue to make improvements at a time when there were changes to curricula and many schools were operating in challenging financial circumstances.

Having regards to the comparative performance between the academy and local authority maintained schools, the Chair referred to the report and noted that in many cases it was the local authority schools that had achieved a better performance.

Councillor Towe emphasised that whilst those schools achieving good or outstanding Ofsted ratings could apply to become academies, schools receiving poor ratings could become sponsored academies. He expressed concerns regarding this process, stressing that to resolve any difficulties it was essential that communication with the academies remained open. In relation to discussion of the role and the size of area overseen by the Regional Schools Commissioner, reservations were articulated regarding the capacity for dealing with local authority level matters.

In response to a question from a Member querying whether it was possible to return a failing academy school to local authority control, the Executive Director confirmed that this was not possible. When an academy school was deemed to be failing, the sponsor would be replaced. Furthermore, local authorities could no longer build/open new schools; they had to work with those academy sponsors who wished to open new schools in the Borough. The Chair remarked that it was intended that the Regional Schools Commissioner would be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee, as would representatives from the Schools Forum.

A Member advised the Committee that in a local FE College, in order for students to reach the required level of competence at GCSE level, it had been necessary to teach them the pre-requisites in mathematics that they should have mastered at primary school. He stressed that there needed to be confidence that the governance of schools was having the desired impact and that improvements were being made.

The Committee recognised that a child's school career being brief, it would be important that any improvements were introduced at the earliest opportunity so as not to disadvantage children. Whilst one Member advocated there being a concentration on foundation subjects, such as English and Mathematics, other Members referred to the need to engage fully with children and young people to make their education both interesting and relevant for them.

Councillor Towe added that in terms of their development upon entering school, it was known that there were some children who were over a year behind their peers. Whilst responsibility for this lay with parents, there was also a wider responsibility for this situation and for its rectification. Ms Rowe reminded Members that the planning and negotiation with schools to achieve such improvements took place during an interval of five years. The Chair also highlighted the importance for educational attainment and improvement of the links with the Chair and Members serving on the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**Resolved:**

That the contents of the report be noted.

**9/18 EDUCATION SERVICES IN WALSALL**

The Committee received a presentation from the Executive Director (Children's Services), Ms Sally Rowe, entitled *Education Services - Overview and Scrutiny Committee*. This featured a structure chart illustrating the Education Services within the Children's Services Directorate and identifying the senior members of staff and their areas of responsibility. She also pointed out that the former Assistant Director (Access and Achievement) had left the employment of the Council in May 2018 and outlined the steps being taken to recruit a successor to this role.

For the benefit of Members, Ms Rowe set out the key issues which would help to shape the Committee's work programme for the year. She noted that whilst there were some schools in the Borough that required more support, there were many schools that were very good and the aim was to increase the number of good and outstanding schools. However, because of the current nature of the educational landscape, there was increased contact by the Schools Improvement function with groups of academies, such as the Mercian Trust. Population data and projections were submitted annually to the Government via the pupil place planning process, which enabled local authorities to influence the location of new schools. The area of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) was a key one for the Council, particularly in view of the high number of children in receipt of an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP), with 6,500 Walsall children being identified by their schools as requiring extra SEND support.

Ms Rowe advised that the number of pupil exclusions was double the national average and placed considerable pressure on the service and on other agencies via the criminal justice system. She highlighted the importance of the work being carried out by the Impact Service on the skills agenda, apprenticeships and working with colleges, especially in relation to those children and young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETS). She discussed the role of the Virtual School that provided for the needs of Looked After Children, and the delivery of a range of traded services to schools. On the latter point, Councillor Towe reminded the Committee that the Council produced a booklet setting out all the traded services provided and requested that this be circulated to the Members.

A further presentation was made to the Committee by the Head of Regeneration & Development, Mr Simon Tranter, and the Employment & Skills Manager, Ms Jane Kaur-Gill, entitled *Skills for the Future*. This made particular reference to the challenges presented in respect of children and young people prior to school, during their school career and post school, and to the steps being taken to link these to the Council's corporate priorities for re-growing the economy. This presentation considered the development gaps between the Black Country and other parts of England, the attainment gap affecting disadvantaged groups, the significant numbers of residents with no qualifications or low skills, the consequences of the skills gap for apprenticeships and the steps being taken to close the gap with Walsall's statistical neighbours via the Walsall Works and Black Country Impact programmes.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Chris Towe, suggested that a holistic approach be followed by all stakeholders to tackle these various issues and that a change in culture was required to ensure that progress happened. He provided a number of examples to the Committee. By putting people at the heart of everything done in Walsall this would encourage confidence in the Borough and its people, making them more productive and better able to look after their families. Investment was also required in adults as well as in children and young people, so that all could make a contribution to wealth generation. With reference to the high number of people lacking qualifications, he pointed out that local FE providers were addressing this, but that this had implications for them due to the high numbers of students that were re-sitting GCSE English and Mathematics examinations. Specifically, he also suggested that the Committee might consider, as part of its work programme, the issues of the appropriate use of Pupil Premium, the role of information, advice and guidance services, and the introduction of the new T Level qualifications.

In response to a question from a Member regarding skills shortages and the implications for apprenticeships in the construction industry, a response was provided by Ms Kaur-Gill who pointed out that Walsall College had a large construction site on its Green Lane campus and had secured funding for a Phase 2 development that would be beneficial to the local construction sector.

A Member informed the Committee that his own company had used the services provided by Walsall Works since 2014 and that they had been able to tailor these successfully to meet what was required. He added that he was aware that apprenticeships in construction were available at Walsall Housing Group.

## 10/18 AREAS OF FOCUS 2018/19

The Committee considered the areas that it wished to focus on during the municipal year and which would be incorporated into the Committee's work programme for 2018/19. Members had received presentations (Minute 9/18 refers) and there was further discussion in relation to the items to be included in the work programme.

The Chair, Councillor Aftab Nawaz, advised Members that envisaged that working groups would be created during the year to tackle specific topics and that he wanted all Members to participate in at least one of these working groups.

### **Resolved:**

1. That the following areas of focus be incorporated into the Committee's work programme for 2018/19:
  - Educational attainment
  - School places/pupil planning
  - Pupil premium
  - Teacher recruitment and supply
  - Autism outreach
  - Pupil exclusions
  - New Leaf Inclusion Centre
  - Out of Borough schooling
  - SEND
  - The transformation plan
  - School funding
  - ESF and Post ESF funding
  - Willenhall E-ACT Academy to attend
  - Invitation to Schools Forum Chair/representative to attend
  - Invitation to Regional Schools Commissioner to attend
  - Access to grammar school places
  - Schools funding and pupil premium
  - Information, advice and guidance services
2. That working groups be established for 2018/19 in respect of:
  - Pupil exclusions
  - Autism outreach
  - Out-of-Borough schooling
3. That should Members have any further suggestions for areas of focus, then these should be in the first instance for communicated to the Democratic Services Officer, Dr Paul Fantom, who would liaise with the Chair accordingly.
4. That a finalised work programme be presented to the next meeting for approval by the Committee.

**11/18 FORWARD PLANS**

The Committee received the Forward Plans of the Council and of the Black Country Executive Joint Committee.

**Resolved:**

That the Forward Plans be noted.

**12/18 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was 4 September 2018.

The meeting terminated at 7.54 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....