

**Minutes of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee,  
Council Chamber, Walsall Council House.**

**Thursday 3 October 2023 at 6.00 P.M.**

**Committee Members present:**

Councillor S. Ditta (Chair)  
Councillor P. Gill  
Councillor T. Jukes (Substitution)  
Councillor P. Kaur  
Councillor E. Morgan  
Councillor L. Rattigan  
Councillor C. Towe

**Portfolio Holder:**

Councillor Mark Statham – Education and Skills

**Officers Present:**

Rob Thomas - Head of Access  
Judith Nash – Head of SEND  
Lorraine Thompson - Virtual School & Vulnerable Groups Lead  
Nicholas Perks - Quality Assurance Team Manager  
Jack Thompson – Democratic Services Officer

Welcome and introductions were made.

The Chair informed Members that the Item 7, Inclusion Hub Update would be presented before Item 6 on Send Developments including EHC systems.

**15 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Latham and S.B. Hussain.

**16 Substitutions**

Councillor T. Jukes substituted for Councillor S.B. Hussain.

**17 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

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

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

**19 Minutes**

A copy of the Minutes of the meeting held on the 5 September 2023 were submitted [annexed].

A Member requested that the following be added to the Minutes under Minute 13. That a Member did not agree that Council's approach to the use of school attendance orders should be as a last resort for a child not attending school.

Members also requested that those present at the last meeting be reflected in the minutes in the present list and not only under the substitution minute.

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2023 a copy having previously been circulated and agreeing the above amendments, be approved and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.**

**20 Inclusion Hub Update – Report**

At the invitation of the Chair the Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills introduced the report and highlighted the salient points.

Virtual School & Vulnerable Groups Lead informed the Committee of the following key points:

- There had been an increase in the number of referrals to the Inclusion Hub;
- The team had been working hard with schools to reduce the number of exclusions;
- The team had visited the youth justice hub to help support children on remand;
- The team was tracking children who had been excluded from school to offer them support;
- There was more work to be carried out on Special Educational Needs (SEN) support;
- An update on this would be presented to the Committee in the future.

Members of the Committee and the Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills expressed their congratulations to the team and the Virtual School & Vulnerable Groups Lead on the work they had carried and their continued efforts.

**Resolved**

**That the Committee note the impact of the work carried out by the SEND Service, including the developments within Education and Care (EHC) Systems.**

## 21 SEND Developments Including EHC Systems – Report

At the invitation of the Chair the Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills introduced the report and highlighted the salient points [see annexed].

The Head of SEND informed Members of the following points:

- It was important that SEN (Special Education Needs) support was not bypassed before entering into the process of obtaining an Education and Healthcare Plan (EHCP);
- The Council had put a robust SEN system in place;
- There were no issues with recruiting staff for the EHCP team and the Council had taken a unique approach to recruitment in the region;
- The Council had recently had eleven applications for the one post within the EHCP team;
- Having a full permanent EHCP team helped the service communicate more consistently with parents, meant that staff received more training, it had helped to reduce the EHCP assessment backlog and had helped to build stronger links with health partners;
- The Council had done work to improve relationships with parents as this was a weakness of the Council;
- A robust early years SEN offer had allowed the EHCP team to offer support to children who had not yet started school;
- Work was being undertaken to improve the local offer and this would be implemented in future;
- Those who had an EHCP using old format would be updated with the new template at their annual review.

A discussion took place between officers and Members, the key points included:

- Members congratulated the team, especially the improved cooperation with health partners and the hiring of permanent staff;
- The national average for meeting the 20-week deadline for EHCP was 49%, the Council was operating at 84% and was aiming for further improvements;
- The local offer was designed in cooperation with parents, and they were supportive of the new offer under development;
- Under the current joint inspection regime by Ofsted and the CQC (Care Quality Commission) the Council was currently graded at a 2. Meaning that the outcomes for children were inconsistent;
- In response to the level 2 outcome, the Council was aiming to show that inspectors upon their return, growth in new projects, strengthened pathways with social care and improvements in EHCP processes and delivery;

- It was the responsibility of the school to make sure that there was a qualified TA (Teaching Assistant) for children with EHCPs which specified support from a dedicated TA;
- The SENCO forum helped to coordinate training for schools;
- The caseload for EHCPs was not more than the national average;
- The Council was working towards delivering other projects which would help to offer alternatives to EHCPs;
- The team was confident it would sustain the high percentage of meeting the statutory deadline for EHCPs;
- When EHCPs were received they had to be dealt with within the statutory timeframes, however, there was a process in place to help manage the differing complexities of each application.

The Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills informed the Committee that success of the team could be built upon, and that good feedback had been received from parents.

#### **Resolved**

- **The Committee to note the impact of the work carried out by the Inclusion Hub.**
- **That the five key areas used to measure the preparedness for adulthood for children with EHCPs be shared with the Committee.**
- **That information of apprenticeship schemes offered to children with EHCPs be shared with the Committee.**

#### **22 Transitions in Special Education Needs – Report**

At the invitation of the Chair the Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills introduced the item and highlighted key point, which included:

- There were ongoing developments being made with transitions;
- New documentation had been published for parents for the EHCP review process;
- There was a backlog of EHCP annual reviews, however, with the new process the aim was to clear the backlog.

#### **Resolved**

**The Committee note the impact of the development progress and achievements made out by the SEND Service in relation to transitions.**

#### **23 Learning Recovery – Report**

At the invitation of the Chair the Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills introduced the report and highlighted the salient points [see annexed].

The Quality Assurance Team Manager informed the Committee of the following points:

- The Councils virtual school was provided funding to help support looked after children and this was also distributed to families;
- The Department for Education provided support for summer schools and the online OAK Academy;
- The Council provided support to help the inclusion of children within the Borough into school;
- The Building Resilient and Inclusive Communities in Schools (BRICS) Programme centred around inclusivity and was funded through allocated funding from Schools Forum;
- The Council worked closely with Kooth, a mental health charity, to offer support school and families help;
- The Council offered a school recovery programme which was offered to maintained schools and these schools were supportive of the programme;
- There had been a slow improvement in Ofsted ratings for schools within the Brough and the Borough was now above the national average.

A discussion then took place between Members and Officers on the report, some of the key point included:

- Members requested that they be presented with an update on the work that is being undertaken to improve year one phonics;
- The Council, through its partners, had highlighted the concern around year one phonics to schools;
- Those schools with low year one phonics results would be receiving more help with phonics, specifically around how they were taught;
- Members requested that Council, through its School Improvement Programme make sure that teachers responsible for teaching phonics in schools have the required training or experience to teach phonics;
- Local Authorities get judged by the Department for Education based on all state schools within their borders and there is no differentiation between maintained schools and academies within the headline figures;
- Members expressed their disappointment that the figures from the Department for Education were presented this way.

### **Resolved**

- **That Members be informed of the work that the Council was undertaking through its School Improvements Programme to improve year one phonics.**
- **That through the School Improvements Programme, the Council monitor that teachers responsible for teaching phonics to make sure that they have the relevant skills and experience to teach phonics and offer support to those who don't.**
- **Recommend Cabinet writes to the Secretary of State for Education to request that public performance data published on the**

**Department for Education website on Local Authorities average education performance should split academy (Multi Academy Trusts or Companies) from maintained schools as Local Authorities have no control over academies and thus should not be judged on their performance.**

**24 Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting would be 21 November 2023.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 19:04.

Signed:

Date: