

**MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE,  
CONFERENCE ROOM 2, WALSALL COUNCIL HOUSE.**

**Tuesday 06 September 2022 at 6.00 P.M.**

**Committee Members present:**

Councillor S. Ditta  
Councillor B. Bains  
Councillor R. Burley  
Councillor S. Cheema  
Councillor I. Hussain  
Councillor A. Hussain  
Councillor P. Kaur  
Councillor L. Rattigan  
Councillor C. Towe  
Councillor T. Jukes

**Portfolio Holder:**

Councillor Mark Statham – Education and Skills

**Non-elected non-voting:**

Ms Sharon Guy - Primary Teacher Representative

**Members:**

Ms Wendy Duffus - Secondary Teacher Representative

**Officers Present:**

Sharon Kelly - Director Access and Inclusion  
Rob Thomas - Head of Access  
Judith Nash – Head of Service Inclusion  
Lorraine Thompson – Head of Virtual School  
Alex Groom - Admissions and Education Sufficiency Manager  
Neil Picken - Principal Democratic Services Officer  
Reena Farmah - Democratic Services Officer

Welcome and introductions were made.

**8/22 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received for Councillor S.B. Hussain and Councillor S. Elson.

**9/22 Substitutions**

Councillor S.B. Hussain was substituted by Councillor T. Jukes.

**10/22 Declarations of interest and party whip**

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

## **11/22 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

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

## **12/22 Minutes**

A copy of the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 June, 2022 was submitted [annexed].

### **Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2022 a copy having previously been circulated, be approved and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.**

## **13/22 School Attendance Bill and Children Not in School Bill:**

A report was submitted in respect of the School Attendance Bill and Children not in School Bill [annexed].

The Head of Access advised that key elements within Bill included:-

- Academy trusts;
- Funding;
- Attendance; and
- Safeguarding.

The Head of Access updated Members on key information contained in the Schools Bill and Schools White Paper. The paper sets out the Government's aim for all schools to be part of a multi academy trust (MAT), or in the process of joining one by 2030. The Director of Access and Inclusion explained that the Walsall Families of Schools vision encourages partnership working, based on the principle that collaboration, federation or academisation, as the most effective means of securing the long term future of high quality education provision in Walsall. School leaders and Governing Boards are to lead the way with the approach that best meets the needs of their school communities, the Council's role being a facilitator of support.

At the end of the presentation the Chair invited Members to ask questions of Officers;

Members requested for an update on the implementation of the National Funding Formula (NFF). The Director of Access and Inclusion responded that the formula was to be finalised by the Government, the new regulations will gradually reduce the scope of the Local Authority to alter funding arrangements; schools will be funded directly in line with the NFF. It was explained that further consultations will take place in the near future on transition to NFF. There is no set time framework for the implementation, Walsall Council are working towards NFF with the schools forum.

Members asked how the Local Authority ensures national targets are met. The Director of Access and Inclusion explained schools were responsible for pupils' meeting the national benchmark targets. The percentage of pupils meeting expected standard in Walsall is currently 58% and the national average is 59%. The authority identifies schools for additional support within core areas to help close the gap.

The Director of Access and Inclusion provided an update on the outcome of the

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Inspection conducted by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission. The inspection took place from 20 to 22 June, 2022 to assess whether the Local Area had achieved sufficient progress in delivering the improvements set out in the Walsall SEND Written Statement of Action (WSoA). The authority are pleased with the outcome that progress and improvements have been identified.

The inspection team held a number of focus groups across the two days with key people who have been involved in the delivery of the WSoA, inspectors met with schools, parents, carers, children and young people to capture their feedback. The Local Area recognises that there is still room for improvement and continues to work collaboratively with partners and families to ensure that an excellent offer is delivered for families impacted by SEND. It was agreed that a copy of the inspection report would be shared with Members.

Members congratulated Officers on the Local Area SEND services inspection outcome.

**Resolved:**

- 1. To share the SEND inspection report with Members.**
- 2. To note the report.**

**14/22 Children not in school (attendance, exclusions, elective home education and children missing education):**

A report was submitted on Children not in school (attendance, exclusions, elective home education and children missing education) [see annexed].

The Head of Access explained that depending on the statute of the schools bill the local authority's responsibilities would change and become enhanced. There are four key areas contained in the report:

- Attendance
- Children Missing Education (CME)
- Elective Home Education (EHE)
- Exclusions.

A discussion took place regarding the attendance data and national comparisons. The Head of Access explained that the government publish the data, the cycle takes several months to be reviewed and published. The report covers data from 2020/ 2021 academic year. Comparisons are made statistically with neighbouring authorities across England, which are demographically similar nationally.

Members questioned the data and asked how attendance could be improved. The Head of Access explained that schools were responsible for improving attendance outcomes and parents were legally responsible for ensuring their child attends school regularly. The Head of Access explained that the new schools bill would enhance responsibilities for parents, schools and the local authority who will coordinate, improvement and encourage good school attendance.

A discussion took place regarding catch up support following Covid-19 for elective home educated Pupils. In response the Head of Access clarified that the authority

received additional funding from the Covid-19 recovery grant to support Pupils. The authority have used this funding to employ a Literacy Officer. Some children have returned back to their previous settings and received one to one support, interventions and mental health / anxiety support. The Director of Access and Inclusions updated Members on the provisions in place for children missing education due to Covid 19. All exams were administered this year, during Covid-19 exams were not administered. The government provided funding to support children and young people to catch up on missed learning caused by coronavirus, importance has been given to the most vulnerable pupils and pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds who were most affected. This funding was withdrawn and replaced with the recovery premium funding.

A Member questioned how the authority safeguarded pupils from missing education. Assurances were given by the Head of Access regarding CME not falling through the system. It was explained that the Local Authority worked in partnership with the Safeguarding Board, health colleagues, GP practices and the Police to ensure CME are identified. Members were advised that the Council undertook home visits for those children who did not attend school consistently. In addition, schools have their own attendance officers to help enforce attendance and the Council have legal oversight of powers regarding attendance where more serious cases are identified.

A discussion took place regarding the suitability of elected home education. The Director of Access and Inclusion explained that Parents had a right to educate their children at home, the local authority's role is to understand the reasons for elective home education, identify the suitability of education, whether that education satisfies legal requirements in a safe and appropriate setting. Parents must provide suitable assurances and maintain contact with the authority. If the authority are not satisfied that a suitable education is being provided or if the parents have not responded to the informal inquiries, Walsall Children's Services will issue a notice in writing to the parent requiring them to satisfy the LA within 15 days that their child is receiving a suitable and full time education. There are penalties for noncompliance [see annexed].

**Resolved:**

**That the report be noted.**

#### **15/22 Fair access and the Fair Access Protocol (FAP):**

A report was submitted on Fair Access and the Fair Access Protocol [see annexed].

The Head of Access updated Members on the Primary and Secondary Fair Access Protocols (FAP) used within the Borough explaining that the FAP is part of the School Admissions process and ensures that vulnerable children, and those who are having difficulty in securing a school place in-year, are allocated a school place as quickly as possible, minimising the time the child is out of school. Members noted that all local authorities are required to have a FAP. The FAPs provide a fair and transparent system to ensure that all schools share the collective responsibility in helping the most vulnerable, by admitting their fair share of children being placed.

Members were informed that the Local Authority receive 10,000 to 11,000 school applications for both primary and secondary schools. In the circumstances where a place cannot be secured mid-year the fair access protocol code can be used. During the 2021/22 academic year, there were 146 primary and 202 secondary FAP applications.

Members were informed that school places for Ukraine children would be provided.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be noted.**

**16/22 Vulnerable Learners Hub (VLH):**

A report was submitted on the VLHub [see annexed].

The Virtual School & Vulnerable Groups Lead provided Members with an overview of the VHL.

Members noted that from September 2021, the role of the Virtual Vulnerable Learners Hub will be extended to reduce exclusions of children aged between 0 to 18 years with a social worker and those who have had a social worker within the last 6 years.

The Virtual School & Vulnerable Groups Lead highlighted that the VLH has a key role in challenging schools where children with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) are at risk of exclusion. During the 2021/22 academic year the Virtual School team have successfully overturned the decision for 28 out of 33 pupils becoming permanently excluded.

A Member asked why Children with social workers performed academically worse than their peers. The Virtual School & Vulnerable Groups Lead explained that this was due to children having a disadvantaged start, neglect and missed education etc. The work carried out by the VLH ensures that these children receive the right support and have aspirations to enable them to achieve their best.

Members congratulated the Virtual School & Vulnerable Groups Lead for the success rates achieved.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be noted.**

**17/22 Recommendation Tracker**

The Principal Democratic Services Officer confirmed that the committee work program had been circulated.

Members were informed that their suggestions for agenda items on teenage pregnancy and overweight children had been accepted by the Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**Resolved:**

**That the recommendation tracker be noted.**

**18/22 Areas of Focus**

Members noted the Committees Work Program and the Forward Plan for Walsall Council and the Black Country Executive Committee.

Members requested an update on young people's homeless and the Finance Funding formula.

**Resolved:**

**That young people's homelessness and the finance funding formula be added to the areas of focus.**

**19/22 Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting will be 11 October 2022, at 6:00p.m.

There being no further business this meeting was terminated at 7.55 p.m.

Signed:

Date:

DRAFT