

# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27 SEPTEMBER 2022

## PRESENT

Councillors Miss L. Blackburn (Vice-Chair), J. Bennett, L. Dagnall, F. Hornby, S. Maitland, M.J. Welton, D. Western (in the Chair), A.M. Whyte, D. Acton (ex-Officio) and M.P. Whetton (ex-Officio)

### In attendance

Councillor Hynes	Executive Member for Children's Services Lead Member for Education
Jill McGregor	Corporate Director of Children's Services
Pamela Wharton	Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care
Karen Samples	Director Education Standards, Quality and Performance
Sarah Butters	Head of Early Years, School Places, and Access
Martina Mould	Pupil Absence Team Leader
Alexander Murray	Governance Officer

## APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. Western, R. Duncan, S. Procter and G. Whitham

### 1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

### 2. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 5 July 2022 be agreed as an accurate record.

### 3. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions were received.

### 4. SCHOOL PLACEMENT PLANNING

The Director Education Standards, Quality and Performance went through a presentation which summarised the report circulated as part of the agenda. The Presentation showed attendance levels of Trafford Children were a lot better than the national average and Trafford's statistical neighbours. The Committee were informed of the amount of learning lost for different percentages of attendance with 80% being over 7 weeks of learning lost over the course of a year and that attendance was used as a key performance indicator within Trafford's Children's services, particularly for early help. This reflected the Council's approach that it was everyone's responsibility to improve attendance as the impacts of missed school days had been shown to be wide ranging.

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The Government had released new guidance the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2022 which, while being non-statutory, highlighted good practice for schools and authorities. The key elements of the guidance were proactive attendance management, having accurate data, having evidence-based interventions, having attendance expertise within schools and local authorities, and the need to proactively remove out of school barriers. In response to the guidance Trafford had a School Attendance Support Team which provided all schools with support around communications and advice, targeting support meetings, and multi-disciplinary support for families free of charge.

The Pupil Absence Team Leader went over the legal interventions around attendance. The Committee were assured that legal interventions were seen as the last resort. The Committee were then informed of the preferred options (which included covered fixed-penalty notices, parenting orders, and parenting contracts) and how they were utilised. Trafford had issued 663 notices in the previous year and over 550 of those related to holidays being taken during term time. The Council did not issue many prosecutions and all of them were for non-payment of penalty notices. Parenting Orders were occasionally added by magistrates' court after a prosecution, which often required parent attendance at parent sessions and did not tend to be used very often. There was a large drive for Supervision orders to be used but they were not used very often within Trafford.

The Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance concluded by informing the Committee that there had been an error in the report that had been circulated and an updated report had been sent to the governance officer to be published after the meeting.

Following the presentation Councillor Blackburn asked whether there was any pattern among children with separated parents when they were with one parent rather than the other. The Pupil Absence Team Leader responded that analysis had not been done but it would be possible once the level of data increased. The Director Education Standards, Quality and Performance added that a cross agency group had discussed children with regular absence and the possible support that could be provided. The Director Education Standards, Quality and Performance informed the Committee about the AV1 robots that could be used to aid young people who were not able to attend class in person to attend virtually instead. Councillor Blackburn added that she had raised her question as there was one young person with one parent who lived out of borough and so struggled to get to school when they were with that parent. The Pupil Absence Team Leader responded that when penalty notices were issued the team would often find such patterns or issues and would work to find appropriate solutions.

The Executive Member for Children's Services informed the Committee that the start well board had discussed the impact of the cost-of-living crisis upon children and families and identified a need to monitor whether the crisis impacted children's attendance through the impact upon children's health and the impact upon parents' ability to afford their child's transport to school. The Pupil Absence Team Leader stated that the Children at Risk of Missing Education (CARME) group, which was a group formed to look at poor attendance, would be looking at

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children whose attendance record had dropped recently as well as those who fell below the standard threshold. The first CARME meeting was to be held the following day and the Committee were assured that the cost-of-living crisis would be considered.

Councillor Dagnall noted the difficulty in discerning the reasons for absence and asked how many of the young people who had issues were known to the Council. The Pupil Absence Team Leader responded that the Council knew most of the Children who were consistently absent although there were still a number who were unknown. The team were focusing upon the group of children with attendance of 65% and under although the service did look at those with 95% attendance and under, especially those who had higher rates of absence than usual. The Pupil Absence Team Leader stressed the importance of strong data collection by schools to further aid in the identification of pupils who were regularly absent.

Councillor Dagnall asked what support the Council was able to offer schools around attendance. The Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance informed the Committee about the EWOs and how the service had been stopped due to a lack of funding. The Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance then spoke of the challenges the Council and schools faced to meet the new requirements from the government, which would need to be met through a multi-agency approach.

Councillor Dagnall asked whether a best practice model could be created for schools to help them structure their approach and whether schools could share staff to fulfil the role. The Pupil Absence Team Leader agreed with the suggestions made by Councillor Dagnall. The Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance added that the virtual school had a wider responsibility for championing attendance within schools across the borough and work was ongoing to fulfil that role.

Councillor Maitland noted the report mentioned 42 children and 42 schools and asked whether those pupils were spread one from each school. The Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded that out of all the schools that took part in the Trafford Team Together (TTT) those were the ones who were judged to have attendance as an issue. Councillor Maitland then asked how the TTT was progressing. The Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded that the programme was in place in Partington and the North of the borough and would be rolled to all schools by March/April 2023. The Corporate Director of Children's Services added that it was a tried and tested way of working taken from other authorities and the DFE innovations programme. The TTT brought all the services together to look at what the need was and who was best placed to provide support. Preliminary evaluation of the service within Trafford had shown it to be very effective. Councillor Maitland asked if there were any outcomes available yet. The Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded that she did not have the information to hand but the evaluation report of the could be shared with the Committee.

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Councillor Acton noted that there were some areas where attendance definitions could be stretched. Councillor Acton then asked about gypsy and traveller children who often struggled to attend school and how having pupils who struggled to attend for those kinds of reasons impacted schools' attendance figures. The Pupil Absence Team Leader responded schools did have codes they could use for pupils being absent for those reasons, but it was difficult to ensure that it was not misused or abused by schools or families. The Committee were assured that the Council would always investigate whenever there were high levels of absence to make sure that the reasons given were genuine. The Pupil Absence Team Leader then spoke around the work the team had done specifically around children from gypsy and traveller families attending school.

Councillor Hornby noted the comments that Trafford did not have a system for tracking attendance across all schools in place and asked if one could be purchased. The Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded that there was a free system in place but not all schools used it. The Council were looking to get I-Share and would be working on getting data sharing agreements in place with schools across the borough. The Pupil Absence Team Leader added that they hoped the government would make it mandatory for schools to use the free system.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the update be noted.
- 2) That the Committee be provided with the Trafford Team Together evaluation report.

**5. ABSENCE AND PERSISTENT ABSENCE**

The Chair introduced this item by noting that school placements were an issue across the borough but recognised that the issue was particularly bad across the South of the Borough.

The Head of Early Years, School Places, and Access gave a short presentation which picked out the highlights of the report circulated as part of the agenda. The Committee were informed of the structure of the teams that looked at planning of school placements and the utilisation of funding received. The presentation provided details of the ScAPP survey and how the aim of the service was to provide places for all children within Trafford not all those who wanted placements within Trafford schools. Many applications had been received from the families placed in Trafford from the Ukraine with 80 places having been received as of the meeting from families within Trafford with 12 coming from outside of the borough.

For primary school sufficiency Trafford had a surplus in every area and 93.4% received a place at their first choice and 98.5% received a place at one of their first three choices. However, Trafford had seen a large increase in the number of in year applications received, with an increase of 56% in the last year.

The Head of Early Years, School Places, and Access went through the list of permanent expansions planned across the borough which would add 665 school

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places. Due to the pressures the Council had had to place children further away than usual and would provide those pupils transport costs when it went beyond the statutory distances.

The Head of Early Years, School Places, and Access then moved onto Secondary school sufficiency. The Committee were informed that secondary school were a much more complicated picture as Trafford only had responsibility for 1 of the 19 schools in the area. The RAG rating for secondary school places was shown to be red across the whole of the borough and the SCAP 2021 analysis stated that Trafford needed 607 additional places, but the situation had changed greatly. The Committee were shown the development options that the Council had considered with short term measures that included the need for Trafford Parents to fill out all 5 options with Trafford schools to protect places for Trafford residents in schools. With regards to long term options the Committee were informed that there was enough evidence to show a new secondary school was needed within Trafford and the Head of Early Years, School Places, and Access explained the funding routes available to the Council to build a school.

Following the presentation Councillor Welton asked if the Council could increase the number of preferences beyond 5. In response the Head of Early Years, School Places, and Access stated that 5 was already above the requirement and the evidence showed that it did seem to work if all 5 of the options were utilised.

Councillor Blackburn asked about the cost of creating school places in Trafford compared to the funding schools received per pupil. The Head of Early Years, School Places, and Access explained it was the capital cost rather than the revenue cost which linked to the expansion across education systems rather individual schools.

Councillor Whetton asked whether the potential new school in sale considered future possible growth. The Head of Early Years, School Places, and Access responded that the SCAP formula looked up to seven years in advance and when the declining birth rate in the area was considered it looked as though the demand for places would stabilise beyond the seven years. The Director Education Standards, Quality and Performance added that had contacted the DFE and the response received was very positive.

Councillor Whetton then asked about the preference scheme, the messaging of the Council, and how strong that messaging was. In response the Head of Early Years, School Places, and Access stated that the Council made it very clear the impact of not filling out all the places and that putting additional options did not impact the likelihood of a child going to their first-choice school.

Councillor Welton noted the amount of transport across the borough associated with children getting to school. Councillor Welton expressed that there was a need to know the implications of that transportation upon traffic within the borough and there was a need to take a joined-up approach to be able to reduce the levels of traffic caused by school placements. Councillor Welton then asked if there was anything that could be done to calculate those issues and whether there were there any hopes of addressing them. The Director Education Standards, Quality

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and Performance responded that at a Secondary Heads standing conference had been presented with the data and had discussed the issues raised by Councillor Welton.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

**6. OFSTED UPDATE**

The Corporate Director of Children's Services informed the Committee that the next two items could be taken together with the slides being around the latest visit by Ofsted and the second item relating to the overall journey since the inadequate rating. The Corporate Director of Children's Services then went on update the Committee on the feedback received at the last visit from Ofsted. Ofsted had identified areas of improvement across all aspects of the service. The Councils had begun the improvement journey from a poor original position following the inadequate rating which instigated the creation of an improvement plan looking at fixing the problem areas as quickly as possible.

The Corporate Director of Children's Services spoke of how the Council had moved from the delivery of the improvement plan to envisioning of an ambition of where the Council wanted to be. This transition had involved a full review of all elements of children's services and data gathering and analysis played a key role in recognising what was needed for Trafford to deliver that ambition for Children's services. The Covid 19 pandemic had actually aided the Council in progressing along the improvement journey as it required the service to build strong relationships with partners in education and health that had not been their previously, which furthered the development of the holistic approach to children's services Trafford was transitioning towards.

The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care spoke to the Committee about children's social services and the improvements that had been made within the practices. The Committee were informed of the work that had gone into the creating a stable leadership team within the service. While there was a higher level of interim workers than the council would want many had worked at the council for many months to a point where they also provided stability within the service. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care expressed to the Committee that despite the progress Trafford had made within the service there was still a lot of work to be done.

The Corporate Director of Children's Services then provided the Committee with the picture of services across the Northwest. Out of the 23 local authorities across the region 10 Councils had received Ofsted ratings of requires improvement and 5 had been rated as inadequate. The Corporate Director of Children's Services assured the Committee that she had not raised those Ofsted ratings to make Trafford seem better but for the Committee to understand the context that Trafford were on their improvement journey in.

Councillor Bennett asked whether the difficulties in recruiting qualified social workers was hindering the delivery of the improvement plan. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded to Councillor Bennett that staffing had

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been a huge issue at first but Trafford had started to see an improvement in the levels of stability within the workforce. The Corporate Director of Children's Services spoke of the role the training programmes, which were available to all staff including agency staff, had been in achieving stability within the workforce, as staff members had responded to the investment in them by staying in post longer. The Corporate Director of Children's Services then informed the Committee of work being done across London's local authorities where they had pledged to not go above certain pay thresholds and not poach staff from each other. Work was ongoing across the Northwest with a view to developing a similar pledge. The Corporate Director of Children's Services concluded her response by expressing the importance of appreciating workers and ensuring they realised they were valued. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care added that there had been a good level of conversion of agency to permanent staff with the improved opportunities to progress into advanced practitioner rolls having had an impact in people making that decision.

Councillor Maitland asked what the barriers were that prevented the service achieving some of the goals within the plans. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that there had been a number of new managers recruited within the service and it was about imbedding the value of audits to develop staff they way to record information effectively to bring about improvement through support. Many managers had feedback that it was finding the time to do audits, so the challenge was to enable them to have that time. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care added that the plan to achieve this was for mangers from across the service to support each other to be able to carry out effective audits.

Councillor Maitland asked whether The Corporate Director of Children's Services was confident of the outcome if another inspection was to happen. The Corporate Director of Children's Services stated that she was confident Trafford was no longer inadequate and that they had very strong foundations, although there were still issues around consistency of practice across the service. During the most recent visit the front door, which was previously seen as being inadequate, was seen as having exceptional elements.

Councillor Hornby asked what progress had been made in developing a not-for-profit agency within Greater Manchester. The Corporate Director of Children's Services stated that There had been conversations across the Northwest authorities to identify the current position. The next stage was to look at the possible shape and logistics for the organisation.

Councillor Blackburn noted the report mentioned the Complex Need Team would require external support and asked for details around what that support would be. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that it was a specialist team and work was required to understand what skill set was required for the team in terms of both health and social care. The Council were wanting to bring in external people to provide challenge and expertise to ensure that Trafford got the model of the team right.

Councillor Blackburn asked whether those rolls would be short or permanent. The Corporate Director of Children's Services explained that there was a team in place, but the work referred to in the report was a review of that team to ensure it had the right make up of staff going forward.

RESOLVED: That the reports be noted.

**7. OFSTED IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY OVERVIEW**

This item was covered under Ofsted Update.

**8. BIKEABILITY**

The Committee were informed that there were no officers in attendance at the meeting to deliver this item so any questions raised would be noted and passed onto officers for a response.

Councillor Welton noted that the report came in at the last moment and the programme was up and running. However, the problem was ensuring that the young people who had missed out when the programme was not running were caught up and Councillor Welton noted that it said TFGM were to do this, but did not provide any details as to how. Councillor Welton spoke of the importance of this programme being promoted to secondary schools and asked how the Council would monitor how many had missed out and how many had since received Bikeability training.

Councillor Welton also noted that the report spoke about the programme being a third stage to programme which covered key skills including how to plan journeys as well as just riding on the road. Councillor Welton asked whether there were any plans to expand the programme to the third stage across Trafford.

Councillor Dagnall asked whether the Bikeability programme linked into the soft skills within the curriculum around personnel development as a way to promote it. The Chair asked that a question around the promotion of the service within Secondary Schools be put to officers.

Councillor Blackburn asked about funding as the programme ran by the school year and funding ran by financial year and how that worked.

Councillor Hornby asked for more information about the level of staff available and if it was adequate.

Councillor Hornby asked for the Committee to be provided with a breakdown of take up by ward so can know where the gaps are.

Councillor Welton suggested that Members look at the Bikeability website and the value of the programme being done throughout young people's time at school. Councillor Welton then asked whether the Bikeability programme linked into the Council's Walking and Cycling Strategy.

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- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That the questions asked be captured and sent to officers for a response.

**9. URGENT BUSINESS (IF ANY)**

The Chair introduced the piece of urgent business which had been received from the Health Scrutiny Committee. The Committee were informed that the item needed to be considered urgently as the creation of a Task and Finish group required agreement of the Committee and waiting to the next Committee Meeting would make it unlikely that the work could be completed within the municipal year. The item related to a request to create a task and finish group to look at access to mental health services for Children and Young people within the borough. The Chair spoke of her support for the creation of the group before opening the floor for comments and questions.

Councillor Whetton, as Chair of the Health Scrutiny Committee, informed the Committee that the proposal was for this to be a joint piece of work and that three Members of the Health Scrutiny Committee were interested in taking part if the group was agreed.

The Executive Member for Children's Services asked whether it was to be focused upon the CAMHS service or the broader mental health provision. The Chair responded that it was around access to all mental health services, not just CAMHS.

Following the discussion, the Committee agreed to form a Task and Finish Group.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the reasons for the item being considered as an Urgent Item of Business be noted.
- 2) That the Committee agree to form a Task and Finish Group to look at access to mental health services for children and young people.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 8.48 pm