

# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 NOVEMBER 2023

## PRESENT

Councillor D. Western (in the Chair).

Councillors R. Duncan (Vice-Chair), J. Bennett, Z.C. Deakin, S. G. Ennis, E.R. Parker, R. Paul, S. Procter, O. Sutton and D. Butt (ex-Officio)

### In attendance

Councillor K. Carter	Executive Member for Children and Young People
Jill McGregor	Corporate Director for Children's Services
Karen Samples	Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance
Sarah Butters	Head of Education Places, Access and Vulnerable Children
Helen Gollins	Director of Public Health
Martina Mould	Public Absence Team Leader
Kate Shethwood	Public Health Consultant
Tracey Staines	Head of Service – Vulnerable Adolescents
Zoe Sweeney	Head of Early Years and Family Help
Harry Callaghan	Governance Officer

## APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S. J. Haughey, E.L. Hirst and D. Acton

## 27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

## 28. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Chair informed the Committee that three questions had been received from members of the public. The first was related to agenda item five, with the second and third related to agenda item 7.

1. I would like to know why schools are able to set their own school holidays? Family time should be a priority and where there is no co-ed option for high schools in an area, holidays MUST be standardised. For example, this year my son & daughter do not have any holidays together in February break or Easter. I do hope Trafford do not intend to fine any parent choosing to holiday over these two periods as that would not be fair, all six breaks should be available for parents to utilise.

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I have never taken my children out of school, and will probably not do so, however I think the question regarding fines needs asking on behalf of parents wanting a cheaper holiday, especially in a cost-of-living crisis.

A verbal response was provided by the Director of Education Standard, Quality, and Performance and this can be seen below –

*The Local Authority are only responsible for setting the dates of school holidays for community and voluntary controlled schools. Academies and free schools, including Wellacre and Flixton Girls School, have their timetables decided by their governing body's or with the trust. We have received this question in the past, and feedback from families has been shared with headteachers of these schools. Quite recently, we had the Secondary Headteachers meeting, where the discussion was had around the next round of school holidays, and we always endeavour to consult with all of the schools and take into account neighbouring authorities school dates. The schools recognise that they will work better together in the future to make sure there is greater alignment, but ultimately the responsibility does sit with their governing bodies and trusts.*

2. What are children and young people's views on inequality and how have their views and opinions been collected?

A verbal response was provided by the Public Health Consultant and can be seen below-

*There have been some programmes of work described in the paper that have involved engagement, sometimes referred to, sometimes not in the paper. We do recognise that there has not been work done on inequalities more generally, as it has often been on a specific piece of service development. More can be done now to bring together that data and insight from individual pieces of work, with a more systematic and deeper analysis of young people's experiences of inequalities, which will form part of embedding children's advocacy and participation in all our work.*

*There's an existing participation and engagement strategy 2022-25, which outlines Trafford's commitment to harnessing young people's voices and using this. Groups involved in this strategy included the Children in Care Council, Youthwatch, Trafford Youth Cabinet, and the Aftercare Forum among others. Some of those bring together young people with experiences who are often less well heard than others.*

*There's a lot of work going on with those groups and with partners in and amongst the Council to review the participation and engagement strategy and the current infrastructure to make sure that the voices of young people are engaged with and reach the right strategic forums and decision makers.*

3. There has been just one mention in the report of the 'beewell' survey; will Trafford be doing any more evaluation of the data from that survey as it gives a detailed understanding of how our children and young people are?

A verbal response was provided by the Public Health Consultant and can be seen below-

*This year's survey is just closing, with approximately 16 schools signing up to this. The survey provides a useful breakdown by neighbourhood, which can often be hard to source from other data sets and was found when producing this paper. The results do require further interrogation and interpretation and it should be noted that the survey is completed by specific young people, in specific schools, so it is not a representative sample but is nonetheless a useful starting point.*

*There is a dashboard developed by the University of Manchester to provide an after-glance view for neighbourhoods and different authorities to compare with each other. Anybody with an interest can access on that, so we would be happy to take views on how to make the most out of that.*

*In terms of within the Council, previously the results have been shared through the Start Well board, to consider the implications for partners. It is also valuable that schools have a line of sight to those findings. The findings have informed commissioning plans and are referenced in the mental health joint strategic needs assessment. Once this year's findings have been published, we are committed to taking these through the young people's engagement mechanisms to supplement the high level of data.*

## **29. MINUTES**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2023 be approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

## **30. SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**

The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance opened by recognising guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE) in May 2022, which was labelled 'Working together to improve school attendance'. The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance highlighted that this was currently non-statutory, however, the Secretary of State had committed to making it statutory. The Committee were informed that this guidance had been established to define the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders to maintain high levels of attendance. The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance spoke of the high amount of work ongoing within Trafford around this, particularly, discussions looking at Trafford's strategies regarding the DfE's guidance. She highlighted that Trafford, overall, are proud of their attendance data, with this being one of the highest in the country, a positive highlighted also by the DfE and Ofsted. The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and

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Performance referred the Committee to latest published data, which had been included within the report provided. She hoped this highlighted the strong picture for children with SEND, but that there was possibly more work to be done in the secondary sector.

The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance also highlighted the data around the impacts of poor attendance, and how bad this could be for results. The Council was being clear that this was everybody's business, with schools and partners encourage to work with rather than against families.

The Committee were informed that officers had established a model draft attendance policy aimed at getting consistency across the borough, on request of schools, with guidance also produced to enhance the culture around attendance in schools.

The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance referred the Committee to the report and its inclusion of Emotionally Based School non-attendance (EBSNA), informing the Committee that they were acutely aware of this issue, especially post-pandemic. The guidance toolkit produced on this had been done by Trafford's Educational Psychologist (EP), who had led with working with colleagues across Greater Manchester (GM) to develop a toolkit that explains the factors on attendance difficulties.

The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance spoke of the work of the virtual school, with the Head of the Virtual School aware that attendance for cared for children was a concern and had a clear priority around improving school attendance for vulnerable cohorts.

One of the expectations from the guidance produced by DfE was to hold targeting support networks on a termly basis for every school. The work on this had begun with a RAG rating in place to work with those red schools as a priority.

The Chair thanked the Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance for the report and asked if the Committee had any questions.

Councillor Sutton asked about persistent absence being a potential early sign of safeguarding issues. He felt that there needed to be a more specific inclusion of the statutory need to consider safeguarding issues.

The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance recognised that attendance was a protective factor for some vulnerable young people. She informed Councillor Sutton that the Head of the Virtual School had greater oversight for children who were potentially in need of child protection. She did say that there were panel meetings happening every week, which was a multi-agency approach to consider the circumstances behind absence.

The Public Absence Team Leader came in and informed the Committee that there was a lot of multi-agencies work ongoing, and that it was imperative that the

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Council addresses persistent absence as it could be a massive safeguarding concern.

The Head of Early Years and Family Help spoke of how persistent absence was a concern, and keeping children safe was a priority. She spoke of the importance of early intervention and prevention, and not waiting for it to get as low as 50% attendance. The Committee were informed that the Head of Early Years and Family Help manages the Trafford Team Together (TTT) service, which had a huge commitment to a family help offer that invites schools to speak about the children they have the greatest concern about, at the earliest opportunity. The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance finished by saying that there were clear expectations that if a child was absent from school, they should be contacting families.

Councillor Ennis recognised the good data for absence in Trafford but felt that the issue was so bad across the country, it should remain an issue. He mentioned that persistent school absence was trending upwards rather than down in Trafford but welcomed the work on early intervention. His first question was if there were specific days of the week that come up more often. He asked how school absence data compares from year groups that started primary school before the pandemic, compared to those who started during the Covid years. He asked what was being done to bring down the high rates of children with an EHC Plan missing an alarming amount of school. His final question asked how many children with EHC plan were currently without a school place.

The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance started by providing assurance that just because Trafford was very high nationally, that they will not become complacent. On the data around children with EHC plans, the Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance spoke that the Council was clear at targeting those schools having the greatest impact on overall attendance data. She provided the example of how at one SEND school, they were having a problem with attendance since covid and that this was now becoming entrenched. To counteract these issues some offsite placements had been created, to manage some of the barriers that these young people have to return to former attendance.

The Head of Education Places, Access and Vulnerable Children noted that the attendance data for 2022/23 was indicative and was not fully verified as of yet. She shared the most recent data, with rates of persistent absence rates down 2.8%, significantly better than the national rate. The most significant improvement was in the secondary sector rates, with a decrease of 4.1%, with rates for children with EHC Plans also being shared.

Regarding Councillor Ennis' questions on year groups and days of the week, data would be provided outside of the meeting. The Head of Education Places, Access and Vulnerable Children shared that absence per year increases year on year from reception up to year eleven. The Public Absence Team Leader added that historically Mondays and Fridays have been the worst, however, moving forward,

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the Council was now data rich in this regard and could look at this in more detail moving forward. There had also been an increase in leave of absence in term times.

Councillor Paul raised concern around the procedure if a child was not attending due to bullying, and what was being done around this issue. She also asked what Councillors could do when this was raised by constituents.

The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded that the Council probably does not hold this level of detail, but that it would play into the work around EBSNA, as this was something that often comes up through the EBSNA toolkit. The Head of Early Years and Family Help mentioned that it was something that was picked up in the TTT approach and came up more in the south of the borough. The strength of the TTT approach, was the ability to capture child and young person approach in working alongside them. The Public Absence Team Leader responded that parents contact the pupil absence team directly, and work was then done to address those issues. The Public Absence Team Leader was asked to provide the contact details for this team.

The Chair asked if the higher levels in the south of the borough came back to inequalities with greater access to social media. The Head of Early Years and Family Help felt that this was an important point and thought that the bee well survey, and its results would be interesting as it aims to capture the young person's voice.

Councillor Parker mentioned the suggestion in the report that it was 3x more likely for looked after children to be persistently absent, and wanted to know what could be done to make sure support did not reduce as the Council comes under greater financial pressure. Councillor Parker also raised that she was conscious that the responses had been taken from the TTT model, but that this had not been fully rolled out across the borough, so questioned what was filling the gap.

The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance said that attendance of cared for children was of a concern, with a lot of analysis going into the reasons for that. She spoke highly of the virtual school and its rich resource to manage the needs of looked after or cared for children. However, multi-agency discussions and panels were taking place to look at that issue.

The Corporate Director for Children's Services also spoke highly of the well-resourced virtual school and mentioned a deep dive that had come to the most recent corporate parenting board, around education of cared for children. The Corporate Director for Children's Services also informed the Committee of the annual bridge conference that had been established, which looked at building a bridge between the work done by the Virtual School and the Council's children social care services. The Corporate Director for Children's Services said that she would share the virtual school annual report. Councillor Parker asked if the data in the annual report included the number of cared for children who went onto higher education. The Corporate Director for Children's Services responded that it does, and the Council has good numbers for this.

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The Head of Early Years and Family Help responded that TTT was not yet in central Trafford, but assured Councillor Parker that the Early Help Panel was in place in this area, which SEND assessment had praised. However, she assured that the Council was committed to the TTT approach.

Councillor Bennett felt that officers should not underestimate the impact this has on parents. The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance said that it was heart-breaking to hear some of the stories, with the educational psychology service providing webinars to parents to offer advice, guidance and support. The Public Absence Team Leader agreed that support for parents and families was key, and that building relationships with parents was really key when supporting problems with school attendance.

Councillor Procter spoke of her love for data but wanted more in-depth detail. This included the causes of absence, whether it varied geographically, and felt that the Council was doing what it could but felt that more could have been done. She responded that this was certainly something that could be taken away and said that the North was where the highest levels of absence were seen. She mentioned that as more data came to light on geographical imbalances, a report could be brought in the future. The Corporate Director for Children's Services spoke of improved engagement with foster carers, providing greater ability to support and challenge carers in an appropriate way. The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance added that there was also a foster carer representative on the Virtual School Board.

Councillor Deakin asked about the psychology service and the take up of this was. The Head of Education Places, Access and Vulnerable Children responded that the take up was at 85%. The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance spoke of EBSNA steering groups which had been set up, which had parents, partners, and schools on. The Head of Early Years and Family Help added that it was a toolkit which was rolled out to schools, and as part of the TTT approach, when children were in year five, schools were being asked to have a focus on EBSNA, as this was of greater concern when children move to bigger secondary schools.

Councillor Duncan asked if it would be possible to have a breakdown of absence data, per school and per ward. The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded that this could be provided.

Councillor Sutton asked if that within the model attendance policy, reward for children on attendance could be stopped, as this created a stigma for children with chronic health conditions. The Public Absence Team Leader responded that this could be added and that these discussions are being had with schools.

The Chair thanked the officers for the report.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the report be noted.

- 2) That Councillor Ennis be provided with further data on his question around increased non-attendance on specific days of the week.
- 3) That the Public Absence Team Leader provide Councillors with the contact details of the pupil absence team.
- 4) That the Corporate Director for Children's Services share the virtual school annual report with Councillors.
- 5) That the Director of Education Standard, Quality, and Performance share with Councillors the data of school absences per ward, and per school after the meeting.

### **31. COMPLEX SAFEGUARDING ANNUAL REPORT**

The Corporate Director for Children's Services introduced the report and informed the Committee that this was the first time an annual report had been produced on safeguarding. The Corporate Director for Children's Services recognised that this was an issue for local and national services. She hoped that the report gives an indication of how seriously the Council takes safeguarding and informed the Committee that it was about being child and young person centric.

The Head of Service – Vulnerable Adolescents began by picking out some of the highlights of the report and referenced the difference it made to young people. The highlights included a really strong staffing resource with good retention and a low rate of interim staff, which helped in providing young people with a stability around their workers, and feedback currently reflected this. The Head of Service – Vulnerable Adolescents spoke of the high level of expertise within the team, who had a greater understanding of the young people and their needs.

The Head of Service – Vulnerable Adolescents mentioned that a lot of work had gone into the development of the complex safeguarding partnership, with a highlight being the partnership working. The Head of Service – Vulnerable Adolescents referred to the development of the SHINE panel and said that these improvements had enabled the safeguarding team to respond to any concerns from young people, often on the same day.

The Head of Service – Vulnerable Adolescents referred to a case study in the report but said that improvements to multi-agency working prevents young people becoming criminalised when they are often a victim of exploitation.

The Head of Service – Vulnerable Adolescents spoke of a further highlight being the wide range of audits material, which helped to understand gaps for young people and gaps within the service. They also receive performance data that helps the team to understand the patterns and themes that were affecting young people. The Head of Service – Vulnerable Adolescents said that what was known from the data was the low re-referral rate within the service. This stood at just 11% which equates to three young people and had been taken as a measure of success of ongoing direct work with young people.



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The Head of Service – Vulnerable Adolescents provided final reflections. She mentioned that it was a female heavy workforce, despite lots of boys using the services. She informed the committee that a male social worker had been recruited. The Head of Service – Vulnerable Adolescents noted the need to be mindful of urban street gang children who have often been victims but were also potential exploiters of other young people.

The final reflection from the Head of Service – Vulnerable Adolescents was that it had been noticed that it was quite difficult to get feedback from young people, with an ongoing drive to ask families and young people for their feedback, to see what the service does well and not so well.

The Chair thanked the Head of Service – Vulnerable Adolescents for the report.

Councillor Bennett asked if there was any evidence of familiar patterns, such as children within the same family. The Head of Service – Vulnerable Adolescents responded that there was some evidence, but there were very few cases. Councillor Bennett followed up by asking if there was a bigger problem than what the Council was aware of. The Corporate Director for Children's Services added that there was a model at Greater Manchester (GM) level, which tried to keep the number of young people working with a shine worker quite low. The Corporate Director for Children's Services mentioned that they have grown the service as there was a belief that there was an unmet need. In response to Councillor Bennett's first question, the Corporate Director for Children's Services responded that there was a pattern on criminality being entrenched within families.

Councillor Butt referred to the report and data on age profiles. He highlighted that around 13/14 there was an increased number of children becoming criminalised and agreed that this was a very vulnerable age. Councillor Butt also mentioned that it increased significantly again at age 15/16, and then tapers off after this age. He asked if there were any lessons being learnt from this. The Corporate Director for Children's Services responded that this was an area where national findings and research, as well as the dynamic nature of the harm and concerns was continually growing. She mentioned that the Council did have the benefit of the GM complex safeguarding hub, which had often been at the forefront of much of the work that had been done. The Corporate Director for Children's Services also spoke of recent engagement with the Lads Like Us GM scheme, where young men who have come through exploitation, have started to follow a different path in life.

Councillor Procter referred to the most recent OFSTED Inspection and its positive report on child exploitation. She thanked officers that she was able to read this, and felt it highlighted the good work being done.

Councillor Parker also thanked the officers and that the report privileged the voices of survivors. The Councillor asked if SHINE services were working with the virtual school. The Corporate Director for Children's Services replied that there was a dedicated SHINE worker in place where there was a belief that a child may

be at risk of exploitation. The Head of Service – Vulnerable Adolescents added that there was a member of the virtual school that sat on the SHINE panel.

The Chair emphasised how proud she was of the report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

## **32. HEALTHY START**

The Director of Public Health provided the introduction, with Trafford in the process of shaping the approach to health inequalities. The Committee were informed that the public health team works closely with several council services, including closely with the Corporate Director for Children's Services. She spoke to the wider determinants of health inequalities, and the impact of these on children. Public health was adopting a partnership approach to reducing health inequalities, which was to be complimentary to the Greater Manchester (GM), fairer health for all. She ended by saying that children live in families, and that you could not think about children's health inequalities without thinking about their wider families.

The Public Health Consultant began by informing the Committee that the report was an overview of a wide-ranging agenda, so was happy to come back on any questions from Councillors. The Public Health Consultant said that the drivers of health inequalities are complex and referred to the evidence of this in the report. The Committee were advised that the Public Health Consultant had tried to structure the paper to a way that it was helpful, and the simplified model that considers the social or wider determinants of health. These things then determine the opportunities people have to live healthily.

The Public Health Consultant informed the Committee that the paper had focused on the second and third layers of health inequalities, with a focus on some of the core groups that are not covered if you take only a geographical or deprivation-based look at inequalities.

The Public Health Consultant referred the Committee to the key figures of what inequalities looks like. She drew the committee to a couple of these, including the significant focus of the paper on the early years provision, particularly from conception to age two.

The Public Health Consultant further referred to the report to improvements that are being seen, which have been covered in the report, and spoke of key data in the West of the Borough. She drew the committee to the data on the national child measurement programme, which was done at reception age, and had shown inequalities in excess weight, had been eliminated since 17/18, with the gap between the most and the least deprived having massively reduced.

Mental health and emotional wellbeing had also been referenced in the report, with an increased need and complexity for these young people. The Public Health Consultant provided some information about what was being done to target and support these young people.

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The Public Health Consultant spoke about the decrease in take up of immunisations since COVID, an issue also seen nationally. She informed the Committee of the targeted work ongoing with the GP practices in the North of the borough, to spark a conversation about why less people are booking in for vaccinations, especially for young children under 5.

The Public Health Consultant summarised the report and referenced the strategic items at the end of the report.

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and asked if Councillors had any questions.

Councillor Ennis felt it was important to make full use of the Broomwood community centre. He asked for more of a focus on mobile gambling, which he saw as a real problem for young men.

The Public Health Consultant responded that there was a new alcohol, gambling, and substance misuse partnership in Trafford, which was taking a real focus on gambling. This had involved lived experience in the room, and that really took over the last meeting. Various discussions had been being had around the groups that were most impacted by this, and discussions had begun to embed these things into the service.

The Director of Public Health responded the need for a focus on Broomwood, which could often be forgotten about as it was in the South of the borough. She assured Councillor Ennis that there was work going on to make greater use of this service.

Councillor Sutton asked what work was being done around sexual reproductive health and access for young people to identity services. He shared that he felt this was grossly underfunded and often subject to hostile attacks in the public sphere. The Public Health Consultant welcomed this, and assured Councillor Sutton of developments with CAMHS partners. The Corporate Director for Children's Services said there had been safeguarding issues around gender identity being one of the factors. There had been discussions being had at local and regional level, to increase conversations on these.

Councillor Procter spoke of how in her ward, four schools were very close to the M60 and added that she has lot of anecdotal evidence on the increase of asthma, when being around petrol fumes. Councillor Procter raised concern about asthma rates and absence from schools, as well as the knock-on effect from being in a school so close to a motorway and asked if public health had any better evidence of this. The Director of Public Health responded that they do not have it to hand, but this could be provided. She did assure the Councillor that there was air quality monitoring ongoing and would send across more high-level data regarding this. Councillor Procter spoke of local group in her ward who had done some work on this.

Councillor Butt asked about dental treatment mentioned in the report, with the focus being on urgent treatment, without mention of prevention, asking how public

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health planned to tackle this. The Public Health Consultant responded that it was important to work on focusing on poor dental health. She spoke of work ongoing closely with the health visiting team, as well as other schemes also in place to work on this issue.

Councillor Paul raised concern for under 18 consumption of alcohol and also the data on vaping. She asked what steps were being taken to warn children of this, so that the number would reduce. The Public Health Consultant responded that the vaping data had been of real concern, with work on the response to vaping ongoing. She mentioned that it was about encouraging vaping for adults who smoke, but also projecting the message that it was bad for young people who had no past experience of this. As for the alcohol statistic, these had been concerning, and work was ongoing in this area for both adults and young people. The Public Health Consultant finished by saying that there was work ongoing in secondary schools to raise awareness.

The Chair thanked all the officers for their input.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That the Director of Public Health provide Councillor Procter with data on the impact of children going to school near a motorway.

**33. OFFICER UPDATE**

Prior to the meeting Councillor Procter had sent questions for the Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance around SEND Tribunals. The Director of Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded to these questions in the meeting.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 8.40 pm