

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 MARCH 2023

PRESENT

Councillor D. Western (in the Chair).

Councillors Miss L. Blackburn (Vice-Chair), S. Procter, M.J. Welton, A.M. Whyte and S. Zhi.

In attendance

Councillor Hynes	Executive Member for Children's Services
Councillor New	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
Glen Perryman	Head of Service for Provider Services
Michelle	Trafford College
Sharon	Trafford College
Anne Fernandes	Student from Trafford College
Marry Anne O'Reilly	Student from Trafford College
Shami Ali Khan	Student from Trafford College
Ravi	Student from Trafford College
Sam	Student from Trafford College
Laura	Student from Trafford College
Toby	Student from Trafford College
Alexander Murray	Governance Officer

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bennett, R. Duncan, F. Hornby, S. Maitland, G. Whitham, D. Acton and M.P. Whetton

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held 24 January 2023 be agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

3. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions were received.

4. PRESENTATIONS BY STUDENTS FROM TRAFFORD COLLEGE

Anne Fernandes addressed the Committee and told them that the young people attending the meeting wanted to talk about the mind the skills gap campaign. Anne explained that the campaign looked to raise funds for colleges to provide high

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quality education to enable people to enter further education or to upskill to be able to enter the workforce. The aim was to develop a strategy which would result in fair and effective funding for courses in colleges across the country so people could access the education they needed. Anne stressed that under funding in post 16 education meant that there would be a lack of skills within the country to be able to do the jobs employers required of them.

Marry Anne O'Reilly provided the Committee with statistics on the number of students accessing college education and informed the Committee that the recent increase in enrolment had not been met with additional funding for colleges. Marry Anne asked the Committee to join the campaign for parity of esteem for colleges so that they aligned with Schools and Universities. Mary Anne spoke to the Committee about the value of a college education and how it allowed people to make mistakes and still be successful. Marry Anne informed the Committee of her own experience and how college education had helped her to find what she wanted to do.

Shami Ali Khan spoke to the Committee about the courses offered at Trafford college and how they could be utilised to help meet the skills gaps in the work force with social work qualifications being just one example. Shami informed the Committee how colleges focused upon the local community and helped young people gain the business and social skills needed for work. Shami told the Committee about the impacts of COVID and Brexit on the economy and how those events had changed the jobs that were available and needed within the economy. Shami spoke about how she was studying health but had also developed a wider set of skills around communication, teamwork, and project management through her studies.

[NOTE: Councillor Welton joined the meeting 18:45]

Ravi and Sam worked together to deliver their update to the Committee on social mobility. Ravi introduced the topic by speaking about social mobility and how young people gaining life skills helped them earn more and gain higher social status.

Sam added that studies had shown qualifications at level 2 gave people the chance to earn more money and the additional level of income increased further as a person went up to level 3. Sam then informed the Committee of what he had gained from completing a series of level two courses.

Ravi took over from Sam to speak about the advantages that further education gave to young people and how those from deprived areas who gained qualifications had the same skills as more advantaged young people. Sam concluded their section by speaking about the reduction in college opportunities and how it was a disadvantage to young people and the community.

Laura spoke to the Committee about the wider benefits of further education for individuals. Laura informed the Committee about her own experience and how studying at Trafford College had helped her develop as a person and build confidence which had led to her becoming a student leader within the college.

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Laura told the Committee about the other opportunities she had been able to take part in at as a student at Trafford College which included joining the debate club, football team, and other clubs. Laura shared with the Committee how taking part in those activities had helped her to develop personally as well as academically.

Toby told the Committee that she was aiming to be a barrister and how Trafford College was a steppingstone for her to move onto university. Being on the debate team had heled her to develop many skills which were important aspects of being a barrister such as thinking logically and quickly on her feet, speaking in public, and organising events across multiple sites. Toby spoke about the work she had undertaken as a student ambassador in support of the LGBTQ community and other causes. Toby finished by telling the Committee about how she felt all the experiences she had gained at Trafford College would help her to become the best Barrister the area had ever seen.

[NOTE: Councillor Zhi joined the meeting at 19:01]

Following the young people's presentations Councillor Hynes stated that each of the young people could give each Councillor a run for their money. Councillor Hynes noted the point of the presentations about how further education was under funded and agreed that it was a concern. Councillor Hynes asked the young people if they had any ideas of how the Councillors could help convince people that the underfunding of further education was an issue that needed to be addressed. Sam responded to Councillor Hynes and shared his view that by sharing the statistics around what people with level 2 and level 3 qualifications were able to achieve compared to those who did not have those qualifications in terms of employability, increased earning power, and job creation.

Councillor New was blown away by what the young people had presented and their aspirations. Councillor New spoke about the issues she saw among young people within the area and asked what could be done to help motivate those young people to push forward and strive for additional qualifications. Anne Mary stated that young people should be told that it is alright to make mistakes and that there is more than one route to achieve what they want to do.

Sam added that having young people who had been through similar experiences would be helpful as they would be able to understand and inspire young people to continue. Sam pointed out that this could be done through community programmes and by using 1:2:1 mentoring.

Councillor Welton thanked the young people for their presentations and asked whether the cost of living was impacting what the young people chose to study or where they chose to live. Ravi responded that the cost-of-living crisis had made her look at the education that would lead to the most money rather than following her interests. Ravi informed the Committee that she had personally switched from archaeology to law because of financial considerations. Sam spoke about his experience of not knowing what to do and told the Committee that it was a conversation he had with a teacher that had inspired him to take on the courses and be part of the groups that he had rather than thoughts about money.

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The Vice Chair thanked the young people and expressed how she was impressed by the number of young women among those attending and speaking about a subject that they were clearly passionate about. The Vice Chair encouraged them all to continue to be positive and to keep pushing themselves forward while supporting those around them. The Vice Chair hoped that they all went on to achieve what they wanted to and added that they should ensure that they enjoyed themselves and what they were doing.

Councillor Procter stated that she hoped to see at least one of the young people becoming councillors as young people like them were needed to share their lives and experiences to shape the political landscape. Councillor Procter discussed the career path that her husband had gone through, which was not a standard path and that they would probably find that their paths would likely not follow the route they expected them to, but that she was sure they would all be successful in whatever they did.

The Chair spoke about how four of her children had all attended Trafford College and had all enjoyed their time there. The Chair was pleased to see that all the young people in attendance appeared to be enjoying their time at Trafford College and were so passionate about what they were doing. The Chair stated that the young people would have multiple options in front of them and that she was certain that they were all confident enough to take the opportunities when they were presented with them.

The Chair thanked the young people, Michelle, and her colleague Sharon who had arranged for the young people to attend the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Young People, Michelle, and Sharon be thanked for attending the meeting.
- 2) That the updates from the young people be noted.

5. NEW ARRIVALS IN TRAFFORD

The Chair opened the item by noting how late the reports had been submitted for the meeting.

Councillor Procter added that she had not received the reports until the night before the meeting and that she would rather end the meeting and roll it over to a later meeting.

The Committee discussed the proposal to adjourn and meet at a later date or whether to continue with the meeting. The Chair noted the problems people raised and put the proposal to adjourn the meeting to a vote. Three Members voted to continue the meeting and two voted to adjourn so the meeting continued.

[Note Councillor Procter left the meeting at 19:38]

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The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care then introduced the item and went through the slides that had been circulate with the agenda. The Committee were informed that there was an amount of information on the national picture which had been added for context and would be skipped over in the meeting so they could focus upon the local picture. The Committee's attention was then drawn to the numbers of people who had come into the borough and the Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care explained that there were several young people who had come in unaccompanied. There were fifteen 18 – 25year olds who had entered the care system as unaccompanied young people who were continuing to receive support from the Council. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care then described the situation with Ukrainian refugees who had come into the area for the Committee.

The Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance covered the education side of Trafford's approach towards new arrivals into the area. The Fair Access protocol was used to help young people who were new to the area to find schools and places for education. The Committee were informed of the work carried out by schools and the admissions team which ensured that no young people had a long gap in their education. When working with these young people additional support was provided to help their families to access other necessities. All of the work detailed to the Committee was delivered at pace and was a collaborative piece of work between the school admissions team, the Family information service, and Trafford Schools.

The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care asked the Committee to note the information on slide 10 of the presentation on feedback received from the families.

The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care then moved on to the section of the presentation which covered Safeguarding. The Committee were told that five children from Ukraine had arrived unaccompanied and the Council had been advised to treat them as privately fostered children. The Council had arranged for additional visits to those young people to ensure they were settling in. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care asked the Committee to note how the Britannia Hotel had been used. When arrangements for using the hotel had originally been made the Council had thought that it would be young men who would be staying in the hotel but that had proven to not be the case. Trafford had received a number of families instead which culminated in 118 people staying at the hotel with 59 of that number being children.

The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care concluded the presentation by informing the committee of the cross department approach the council was taking and how it involved staff from children's services, housing, and regulatory services. While there had been some issues the Trafford community had been widely welcoming of the families who had come into the area and the service were committed to working in partnership to ensure those families had the right support.

Councillor Zhi asked about safeguarding concerns that had been raised around the different cultural norms with families from Hong Kong. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care responded to Councillor Zhi and informed the

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Committee that referrals had been received regarding physical chastisement of children and there had also been some instances of children being left home alone for an extended period of time. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care added that it was not solely families from Hong Kong and there were many new arrivals who needed to receive communications around the statutory requirements that services had to work to in the UK.

Councillor Zhi asked what language and cultural support the council provided to families for whom English was their second language. In response to Councillor Zhi the Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care informed the Committee that the council always provided an interpreter when they attended visits.

The Vice Chair asked a question related to slide 4 of the presentation about the checks of young people being under 18. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care responded to the Vice Chair by explaining that the age assessment checks were done when someone presented as being over 18 but insisted that they were under 18. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care detailed the approach that the Council took to determine the persons age and assured the Committee that the Council treated them as young people until they received evidence to the contrary. The Corporate Director of Children's Services added that it was a very thorough process that was particularly challenging when a person has been through traumatic experiences and was unsure of their own age.

The Vice Chair asked about the Afghan arrivals and whether any of those families had gone on to live independently. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care responded that she did not have the figures to hand but the service had received feedback from several of those families saying that they had received excellent support. The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care was aware that some of the families had found their own private accommodation but could not give definitive numbers.

The Vice Chair asked whether children from Ukraine and Hong Kong who lived further than walking distance from the schools where they had been placed received support from the Council to attend school. The Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded that Broadoak had arranged its own transport for children staying at the Britannia Hotel. For the Ashley Hotel the council had managed to find additional funds to provide a solution for young people. The Vice Chair asked how the Council were ensuring the young people were being taken care of. The Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance stated that officers would be travelling with the children during their first week to ensure they knew where they were going and it was hoped that they would be able to reduce that support from the second week onwards, as the young people become more independent.

The Vice Chair asked whether any additional support would be provided to the schools to ensure that the young people were integrated successfully. In response The Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance informed the Committee that the Council had met with the headteachers of the schools in advance of placing the children and had asked them what the best way was to move forward. The Council was passporting funding to the schools themselves so

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they could determine the best way to support those young people. The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services added that the Council were having conversations with Health Colleagues around support. The Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance added that there would be focused school nurse support would be provided for the young people.

The Vice Chair asked whether Officers were aware of any additional support or activities were going to be provided over summer for those young people. The Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance responded to the Vice Chair that the Council would use the funding that it had available during the summer holidays to support the most vulnerable young people working with sports partnerships and multi-agency services.

Councillor Welton spoke to the Committee about how one of the single mothers from Ukraine had stayed with him in November. During the time that they stayed with Councillor Welton a school place was found for the daughter very quickly and she attended that school for six months. Councillor Welton went on to describe how the Home Office had taken the mother and child into temporary accommodation in Carlisle, which lead to the child missing 5 weeks of school. The family were then moved to Northenden before being moved to the Ashley hotel, which was close enough to the school the child had originally attended to enable her to go back.

Councillor Welton read out a doctor's note in support of the family's asylum claim, which spoke of the moves and the impact they had upon the child. Councillor Welton noted the excellent work of Trafford Council in supporting the family and finding a school place and asked whether there was any asylum support that could be offered to the family. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded to Councillor Welton that the service could provide advice and support for the family and could sign post them to lawyers who had expertise in dealing with asylum cases.

Councillor Welton spoke about the excellent service provided by the Altrincham Community Hub and asked whether they were receiving additional funding. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that additional funding had been provided in recognition of their excellent work and what they were needing to do.

Councillor Welton asked for the list of primary schools the children from the Britannia hotel were going to. Altrincham Church of England Primary School had taken the majority and Stamford Park Primary School provided some and were willing to take in any additional children placed at the hotel.

Councillor Zhi noted that on page 15 of the presentation it said schools were full and asked whether local children were still able to secure places. In response to Councillor Zhi the Director Education Standards, Quality, and Performance stated that the statutory duty was around year 7 and then there was an in-year duty where they would place young people using the fair access criteria. Fair access was used when a child had been through the full placement process but were unable to be placed and vulnerable children were given priority. The Director

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Education Standards, Quality, and Performance explained that some schools did refuse places to children and in those circumstances the Council did try to negotiate with academies.

The Executive Member for Children's Services concluded the discussion by stating that she felt Trafford's response had been fantastic and thanked all the officers, schools, communities, and councillors for the support they had provided.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

6. CHILDREN'S PLACEMENTS SAVING PROPOSALS

The Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care introduced the presentation which covered the budget of the children's placements, the savings that had been achieved over previous years, and the challenges the service faced in delivering further savings. It was explained to the Committee that the budget for the year included a 12.5% increase for foster carers, which had been agreed by central government. The Committee's attention was then drawn to the over £1M in spend that occurred in P8 of 2022/23 due to new children coming into the system, which demonstrated the pressures within the system. The Committee were informed that there were twelve children with very complex needs which required high staffing levels and residential care provision. Out of those twelve children the Council were looking to step two down into foster care.

The Head of Service for Provider Services drew the Committees attention to slide 5 of the presentation which showed the breakdown of costs for some placements. The Head of Service for Provider Services described the different options of support that were available and the costs of using external services such as Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs). The Committee were told that when there was no fostering support available that met the young person's needs, the Council had to move them into residential settings. The Council were currently supporting 19 children in external residential placements at a cost of around £3.6M per year. The Committee were asked to look at page 7 of the presentation which showed savings which could be realised by young people being able to step down into other services such as fostering.

The Head of Service for Provider Services informed the committee of the budget management controls which were in place with a high-cost placement clinic, external placement panel, and Budget Monitoring all focused on ensuring that Trafford achieved value for money while providing the right level of support. The Committee were then shown a graph which depicted that the number of children in care in Trafford reached its peak of 410 in December 2020 and had reduced since then to the point where the Council's current position of 345.

The Committee were informed that Trafford had a very high level of cared for young people placed with parents and the service had put a programme in place to address the issue. The programme had proven successful and reduced the percentage of children care for by parents to 14% from 20% which was still much higher than the national average (7%) and slightly higher than the regional average (12%).

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Slide 14 of the presentation gave an overview of the Trafford Demand Management Strategy which was aimed at ensuring that the right placement was in place at the right time to ensure young people received the correct support and prevented them stepping up into care or higher cost placements. The Head of Service for Provider Services informed the Committee that as part of this work the council was looking to predict demand for future years to enable them to plan resources effectively. The Head of Service for Provider Services had covered the 16 plus provision in detail the last time he came to the Committee, so he provided a brief overview stating that the service was focused upon ensuring that the right placements were in place for young people to move into when they turned 16.

The Head of Service for Provider Services concluded the presentation by speaking about Project skyline which aimed to provide greater sufficiency for all local authorities across GM and how the savings that had been made in previous years meant that any additional savings would be more difficult to achieve.

The Vice Chair asked what PNW what short for. The Head of Service for Provider Services answered that it was Placements Northwest.

The Vice Chair asked whether there would be a cut off when the Council would not have any more Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) granted. The Head of Service for Provider Services responded to the Vice Chair that several young people had been identified as being eligible for SGO over the next 18 months.

The Vice Chair asked what the relaunch of No Wrong Door would entail. In response to the Vice Chair the Head of Service for Provider Services explained that there were multiple posts required for the model that the Council were struggling to fill. When this was examined closely the Council had found that they were competing with several other Councils for people qualified for those positions. Of those positions one was still vacant and the Council was trying to appoint to that role. The Vice Chair asked whether the Council could train people up for those positions. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that the Council had looked to train someone, but they had decided to stay in their current role. The Corporate Director for Children's Services emphasised that the positions were highly specialised and there were a limited number of people who could be trained for those roles.

The Vice Chair note that an amount of funding had been agreed for the number of children currently in the system and asked for more detail around what would happen if more came into the system. In response the Corporate Director of Children's Services informed the Committee that the service had been provided additional funding within the Medium-Term Financial Plan in recognition of budgetary pressures being driven by the market. Work had been done to simplify the services budget so that it was more transparent and officers could see where the pressures were. The expensive placements arose when children came into the system and the Council did not have a suitable place available. Due to the increased complexity of cases this was occurring more often than it had previously.

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Councillor Welton stated that it was a very impressive report with a lot of detail and that the officers knew the brief and the service well. The Corporate Director for Children's Services thanked Councillor Welton for recognising the work that had gone into creating the report. In recognition of the short amount of time the Councillors had to digest the information the Corporate Director told Members that they could send through any further questions they thought of after the meeting via email.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That Committee Members are to submit any additional questions they have via email.

7. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES - TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATE

The Chair gave a brief overview of the work that the task and finish group had done to date. The Committee were informed that the meetings with providers had gone well and the group were looking to hold two or three more meetings before submitting a report to the Committee for approval.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

8. TOPICS FOR CONSIDERATION IN 2023/24 MUNICIPAL YEAR

The Chair informed the Committee that there was an item on SEND which would be deferred to the next year and asked if anyone had any other items to suggest for the following year's work programme.

The Governance Officer suggested that the Committee contact the young people from Trafford College to ask them to put forward suggestions for topics for the next year and the Committee approved the suggestion.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That SEND update be deferred to the next municipal year.
- 2) That the Committee will contact the young people from Trafford College to suggest items for the next municipal year.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 p.m. and finished at 8.43 p.m.