

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 FEBRUARY 2021

PRESENT

Councillor D. Western (in the Chair).

Councillors T. Carey (Vice-Chair), J. Dillon, J. Holden, S. Longden, A. New, S.B. Procter, D. Acton (ex-Officio) and Dr. K. Barclay (ex-Officio)

In attendance

Jill McGregor	Corporate Director of Children's Services, Trafford Council
Karen Samples	Director of Education Standards, Quality and Performance, Trafford Council
Claire Fisher	Schools' Capital Projects Manager, Trafford Council
Lynsey Burridge	Virtual Head Teacher for Children in Care, Trafford Council
Pamela Wharton	Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care, Trafford Council
Fabiola Fuschi	Governance Officer, Trafford Council

Also Present

Councillors C. Hynes, Executive Member for Children's Services

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1. ATTENDANCES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bennett and Miss Blackburn.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Carey declared a general interest in so far as any matter related to his employment.

3. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no public questions received.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that, subject to the change to minute 48 School Readiness - to read "Director for Education Standards, Quality and Performance", instead of "Interim Director for Education Standards, Quality and Performance" the minutes be agreed as a correct record.

5. AN UPDATE ON THE POSITION OF SCHOOLS AND HOW CHILDREN ARE PROGRESSING IN EDUCATION THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

The Committee gave consideration to a report of the Director of Education which provided an update on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on schools in Trafford and the response to this during the autumn term. The report also included an overview of remote learning which schools were required to provide and the strategies schools adopted to address lost learning.

The report author, accompanied by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, the Virtual Head Teacher for Children in Care and the Strategic Lead Practice, Improvement and Learning attended the meeting to present the information and address the questions of the Committee.

Officers informed of the organisational, operational and financial difficulties schools encountered following the announcement of the first lockdown in March 2020 and the reopening of schools in September 2020 to ensure that pupils could be safe and continued learning.

Members learned about the number of positive cases in school and children isolating. Since January 2021, the number of cases had reduced due to the reduction of children and young people attending schools. The Public Health Team continued to support schools through a fortnightly meeting with school leaders to share good practice, lessons learned and support in scenario planning.

Officers reported that school attendance remained strong with vast majority of schools reporting attendance level at least in line with national expectation averaging at 92%. A Department for Education (DfE) Portal recorded the requests for school places for those pupils entitled to attend school during the latest lockdown. Officers also reported an increase in number of families who, for different reasons, opted for Elective Home Education for the current academic year.

Officers informed members of the remote learning offer in Trafford and the measures and resources in place to ensure that classroom curriculum, length of work, pupils' engagement, assessment and feedback were delivered consistently. Officers also outlined how the remote learning offer was diversified to provide support to all parents and pupils. The School Improvement Quality Assurance process was ongoing to further develop and improve the remote learning offer. Although the Ofsted suspended its inspections during the pandemic, the regulator visited school settings to ensure that measures had been put in place to continue formative activities remotely.

Officers informed of the Government funding to address the impact of the pandemic and lost learning. Although schools had autonomy on how to spend the funding, the main focus had been on basic skills in primary schools and literacy and mathematics in the secondary sector. However, officers reported that particularly pupils eligible for pupil premium funding had fallen behind with reading as an area of concern. Officers shared with the Committee the Curriculum Recovery Toolkit to support schools with their curriculum recovery planning.

With regard to children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), officers continued to respond to requests for Needs Assessments or Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and 81% of plans had been issued within the 20 week timescale.

Members sought and received clarifications on several matters such as the contingency plans in case of absence of Welfare/Education Support Officer, the number of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) who received home education and how the provision linked to “catch up” funding was being accessed by children at home, the waiting list for accessing support services for children with mental health issues, attendance of school representatives at Children in Need meetings, Covid-19 vaccination for members of staff at special schools, availability of Students Premium, measurability of personal educational plans.

RESOLVED: -

1. That the content of the report be noted;
2. That information about accessibility of services for children with mental health issues be brought to a future meeting of this committee;
3. That evidence of how personal educational plans support children to achieve be brought to a future meeting of the committee.

6. TRAFFORD SCHOOL SUFFICIENCY AND PLACE PLANNING

The Committee gave consideration to a report of the Director of Education which provided a detailed description of the approach to strategic school place planning in Trafford to ensure there continued to be sufficient school places for current and future children living in the Borough.

The Director of Education attended the meeting accompanied by the Schools' Capital Project Manager and the Executive Member for Children's Service to present the information and address the questions of the Committee. Unfortunately, the Admission Lead could not take part to the meeting this evening and any specific questions about admissions for which an answer could not be provided at the meeting, would be taken to the Admission Lead and an answer would be given in due course.

The Director of Education informed that, currently, there were just under 42,300 pupils in Trafford schools. These were spread across 65 primary schools, 19 secondary schools, 7 special schools and 2 alternative provisions and 94% of educational settings in Trafford were rated “good or outstanding” by the OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education). These positive rates played a role in the fact that most of the schools in Trafford were fully subscribed.

The Director of Education outlined the forecast methodology to plan for school places. There were primary and secondary planning areas and data was considered from a number of different sources such as General Practitioners, school census, housing development, coordinated admissions and historic cohort data which provided trends and patters occurred in the last years.

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The Director of Education informed the Committee that accurate forecasts for school places were essential in determining the Basic Need Grant Allocation and how this was spent. The Director outlined how the Developer Contribution would be utilised to fund new school places and how the special provision fund to make capital investment for provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) was utilised. The Director also informed of the current position with regard to Early Years and the fact that there were more children who resided outside Trafford who attended Trafford's Early Years places than Trafford's children who attended Early Years settings out of the Borough.

Members thanked officers for the detailed report on the demand for school places and the methodology adopted to meet the demand. Members sought clarification on the number of new "free" school places and those under Local Authority's control over the last three years and what proportion was dedicated to provision for vulnerable children. Members also sought to gather an understanding of how many of the additional 520 new secondary school places for 2021/22 were for children who lived in Trafford and how many for children who resided elsewhere. Members enquired about how primary and secondary school places were planned for in relation to new housing developments.

Officers explained that the complexity of the grammar school system in Trafford made the demand for school places more challenging as it included pupils who resided in other areas. Constant liaising between Council's departments such as School Places and Development Control, the introduction of the Infrastructure Levy and resources such as the "Section 106 Officer" would assist in obtaining contributions from developers and details were provided about places for primary schools in Sale. The discourse about planning for future demand in relation to future, possible housing developments, took place at strategic board level.

RESOLVED: -

1. That the content of the report be noted;
2. That further information concerning school places be provided to members in due course.

7. UPDATE ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES' PROGRESS AGAINST OFSTED RECOMMENDATIONS (MAY 2019)

The Committee gave consideration to a report of the Corporate Director of Children's Services which updated on the progress on the improvement activity in Children's Services against the Ofsted recommendations as reported in May 2019.

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The Corporate Director for Children's Services attended the meeting and was accompanied by the newly appointed Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care and the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services.

The Senior Officer informed the Committee that the improvement plan had been refreshed and the ambitions for the service had been linked to performance targets and children's outcomes, drawing on the strengths of the partnership. The same had been done for the Corporate parenting Board.

The Senior Officer continued explaining how difficult had been driving change during the pandemic when members of staff had to work remotely. The strategy adopted consisted in linking the response to the pandemic with the improvement plan. The first main area of focus was strengthening leadership and management team with a single service approach, looking at education as a whole with children's social care. The second area of focus was, quality assurance and management framework to ensure that managers focused on quality of practice and its impact on individual children. Another area of focus was the voice of families and children as well as input from practitioners.

The Improvement Board continued to meet with richness of representation from Health services, Greater Manchester Police. Head teachers from primary and secondary schools had joined the Board and an all range of engagement mechanisms had been established. Majority of case files were rated "required improvement / better" and just a small proportion as "not good enough" and a moderation process was in place. During the pandemic visits to children and their families continued. 100% of children subject to a Child Protection Plan had contact with their social worker in the last 12 months and two thirds of them had received a face to face contact.

The Director of Early Help informed the Committee that as a crucial part of the improvement plan a Children's Services and Early Help redesign was taking place to achieve clarity of roles and responsibilities and review the governance aspect of services which was a key focus of the Ofsted inspection. A recent visit of the advisor from the Department for Education, who was able to meet and speak with practitioners, outlined the improvement reached in the last period. The advisor commented how the organisation had changed for the better compared to 12 months ago.

The Chair thanked the officers for their work on the improvement plan.

RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the next meeting would take place on 16th March 2021 at 6:30 p.m.. This would be likely to be a virtual meeting.

9. URGENT BUSINESS (IF ANY)

There were no items of urgent business received.

10. EXCLUSION RESOLUTION

None

The meeting commenced at 6:30 p.m. and finished at 8:40 p.m.