

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 JULY 2022

PRESENT

Councillors Mrs Denise Western (in the Chair), Miss L Blackburn (Vice-Chair), Councillor Acton, Councillor Whetton, Councillor Duncan, Councillor Hornby, Councillor Maitland, Councillor Welton, Councillor Whitham and Councillor Whyte.

In attendance

Councillor Adele New	Lead Member for Education
Jill McGregor	Corporate Director, Children's Services
Karen Samples	Director Education Standards, Quality and Performance
Simon Hughes	Governance Officer
Alexander Murray	Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dagnall and Bennett.

1. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the Membership of the Committee for the 2022/23 Municipal Year as listed below be noted.

Councillors Denise Western (Chairman), Linda Blackburn (Vice Chairman), Fiona Hornby, Sue Maitland, Graham Whitham, Amy Whyte, Mike Whetton (Ex-Officio) and David Acton (Ex-Officio).

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee received a report detailing the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee's Terms of Reference

RESOLVED: That the Terms of Reference be noted by the Committee.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

4. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions submitted.

5. OFSTED MONITORING REPORT

The Corporate Director of Children's Services presented the report and outlined that Ofsted had visited Trafford recently but, because of Purdah, the report could not be published until the 6th of May. The inspection found services had improved particularly in respect of children in care.

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The Council had responded to the impact of covid and had actively improved their ability to address issues caused by the pandemic. There were plans in place to address issues around staff turnover in response to the recommendations made by Ofsted around instability within the workforce. However, improvements were starting to be seen with 62% of staff having been employed at the Council for 6 months or longer. Another positive development was an increase in the number of case file audits, which ensured that staff were not given too many cases to handle.

The service had implemented a new approach in respect of child improvement and a child improvement chronology was being developed which would assist with this. There had also been a 12% reduction in care orders, which was a positive development. The Council had accepted the Ofsted recommendation that care plans needed to be more meaningful and the team were working hard to meet that recommendation. The Corporate Director of Children's Services concluded the overview of the report by informing the Committee that there would be 2 inspections the following week, which the Service were fully prepared for and further monitoring visits would take place in due course.

Councillor Maitland asked if any of the agency staff currently working would be interested in a permanent contract with the team. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that a small number of staff had been recruited to permanent contracts and meetings had been held with staff to encourage this. The Council were looking to highlight the advantages for Council workers in comparison to agency roles. The Committee were assured that the care review would look at what the Council could provide for its staff.

The Chair asked if Trafford salaries competed with other employers, particularly other Local Authorities. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that the Council had provided a market supplement, which made salaries competitive. However, for staff, pay was no longer the biggest issue and the service was continually analysing what the biggest issues were for those wishing to join or leave the Authority. Exit interviews with staff had been conducted and the feedback received had influenced the services approach. Agency pay was difficult to compete with, so it was vital that the Council provided a good environment for employees.

Councillor Acton welcomed the improvements recognised in the Ofsted report. He then noted that children in care were not always able to attend review meetings so not always able to contribute. Councillor Acton then asked whether this was an area for development and, if so, what the development process would be. The Corporate Director of Children's Services replied that there had been a review of review meetings and they were now taking place in a different way, which included strengthening the role of Independent Review Officers. There were also plans to strengthen the meetings the Council had with children, both before being taken into care and in after-care. The Corporate Director of Children's Services added that performance within the team was continually monitored and improvements had already been seen.

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Councillor Hornby welcomed the potential introduction of a Not-for-Profit agency and queried what the latest position on this was. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that all Local Authorities had signed up to this and once details had been confirmed a report would be submitted to the Committee.

Councillor Welton questioned whether any other local authorities had a good level of performance in retaining staff Trafford could learn from. The Corporate Director of Children's Services replied that this was a national issue. However, Trafford were doing well in respect of retaining staff.

Councillor Welton asked what the highest level of seniority for agency staff was and what the shortest period an agency staff member would be employed was. Councillor Welton also asked how changes in staff would affect young people. The Corporate Director of Children's Services stated that it was a big priority for the Service to maintain a stable workforce and Ofsted had recognised Trafford's progress. The service could not compel people to stay however, the Council did offer attractive workplace conditions. The Council were looking to recruit experienced workers, but it would be challenging to do so.

Councillor Blackburn enquired about the status of interim employees and whether they were able to apply for permanent positions. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that interim employees were entitled to apply for permanent roles and the Service was trying to reduce the level of agency staff recruited. There were also plans in place to extend fixed term contracts to support children and families.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted
- 2) That the Committee are to receive further updates
- 3) That the Committee receive a report on the Not-for-Profit Agency once details were available.

6. SOCIAL CARE REVIEW

The Corporate Director of Children's Services introduced the report and outlined that a National Report Services Review had been undertaken. The Government had not yet committed to a response. The review had identified a number of causes for concern which increased the pressure on Children's Services. Those causes for concern included an increase in Section 47 Reviews which did not move forward to a Child Protection Plans and increasing pressure on Foster Carers.

The Review had 87 recommendations and the main ones were highlighted within the presentation. The Committee were informed that the majority of recommendations from the review had not yet been enacted nationally.

Following the presentation, Councillor Blackburn expressed her concern about the removal of Independent Reviewer Officers and asked whether the Council was meeting its requirements. The Corporate Director of Children's Services outlined

that this would require changes to primary legislation and was one of the more controversial of the recommendations.

Councillor Blackburn questioned whether the recommendations were similar to the Stronger Families programme. Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that the Stronger Families Programme still existed and the team were considering taking a multi-disciplinary approach moving forward. The Stronger Families programme looked at support that was needed for adults in order for them to be able to support their children.

Councillor Whetton enquired if there were any technological solutions which would be available to support staff. Corporate Director of Children's Services replied that the Council needed to clarify how different services collected information and how this was shared to ensure compliance with GDPR. It was accepted that the Council needed to be more proficient in sharing information. The Corporate Director added that this was a comprehensive review which would need further detailed examination by Officers.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

7. SCHOOL FUNDING

The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance, introduced the report. The report outlined the funding formula for how grants were allocated to Schools. The primary formula allocated to schools was £3,500 per pupil and, in secondary schools, this was £5,000 per year. Additional funding could be granted in respect of Special Educational Needs and English as a second language. Grant funding was also available from the Government which, if accepted, would be very useful for Boroughs such as Trafford.

The Pupil Premium was supportive funding for students who had been eligible for free school meals and was around £950 per pupil. The pupil premium was to be used, in part, to ensure children had access to physical activity opportunities. There was also additional funding allocated for children in care or care experienced children.

Councillor Whitham asked how many schools were struggling with their budgets and required support. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance replied that there were 2 schools currently in that position, but they were being supported. There were no schools carrying big surpluses. There was a limit of 8% on this and the Council required schools to account for that.

Councillor Whetton requested that budget plans for schools be submitted to the Committee and this was agreed. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance commented that there was a report on regular meetings with schools in respect of budgets which could also be shared.

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Councillor Blackburn asked what the timeline was before the Council intervened. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance responded that the general policy was three years, but it was examined on a case-by-case basis.

Councillor Blackburn asked if any support was provided to Governing Bodies in respect of this. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance responded that training for Governing Bodies had been offered.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That budget plans for schools be shared with the Committee.

8. ELECTIVELY HOME SCHOOLING

The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance introduced the report and commented that home schooling was a decision for parents. They could use private tutors to support this but there was no requirement to do so. The Council had made it clear to parents of the financial and educational impacts of the choice to home school, but this was a decision for themselves. All children were entitled to be home schooled unless there was a School Attendance Order in place. However, if there was a safeguarding issue, the Council would need to intervene. If the child had an EHCP provision would need to be made to ensure their SEND needs were being met. Parents were provided with a named Support Officer at the Council who would be able to provide support. If there were other areas of concern, contacts would be provided to establish support networks.

The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance informed the Committee of the numerous ways a child could be educated if parents did not wish their child to attend mainstream schooling, such as flexible schooling. Where Officers were aware that a child was being home schooled a questionnaire was sent out to the parents. There was no requirement for home schooled children to follow the National Curriculum, but suitable questions were asked to ensure the child was being educated effectively.

The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance spoke of the difficulties in obtaining information about children who were home educated. The Council sought to gather information on home educated children and everything they received was always welcomed. Any concerns identified by Officers or parents were raised with the family of the child. However, if concerns remained this would be referred to the Family Education Panel to reach a decision. However, it was very rare that stage was reached.

There had been 190 EHE (Electively Home Educated) cases classed last year. There were now 208 which would need reviewing, particularly during the pandemic and 93 cases had been closed last year. The levels of home schooling fluctuated depending on the school year the child was in. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance stated that there were many reasons why a parent might choose to home school. Some may have been due to the pandemic and the resulting impact on the anxiety and health of the child.

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However, there were a number of other possible reasons such as dissatisfaction with the system and it was difficult to determine what the reasons were.

The Committee were assured that Officers continually monitored children with social care issues who were home schooled and many had returned to school. The Government had proposed a register for Local Authorities to track children who were home schooled and enable a clear policy to be established. The Council had made it clear to parents who chose to home school that if they then wanted to return their child to mainstream education they may not be allocated their preferred choice of school.

Councillor Maitland enquired what the category was for children not wishing to attend school or parents not wishing their child to attend school. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance replied that this was a complicated issue. There were some children with anxiety and the Council would refer them to the Medical Educational Panel if there were significant issues.

Councillor Hornby asked how Trafford compared to other Boroughs in respect of this. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance replied that the levels in Trafford were very comparable to other Local Authorities. When the comparison had been completed it could be shared with Members.

Councillor Blackburn asked if there were issues with EHE children having difficulties in qualifying for further or higher education in later life. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance commented that the questionnaire highlighted that they were not disadvantaged. When they reached an appropriate age EHE children would be referred to Careers Advisors who would provide support.

Councillor Blackburn further asked if a family chose not to enrol their child for an exam, how an assessment would be conducted on what they had learned. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance responded that this would be a decision for the parent to determine.

Councillor Blackburn enquired if there were any young people who were home schooled which the Council were not aware of. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance acknowledged that this was a legitimate concern. It was difficult to monitor as Government regulations did not allow for that level of scrutiny. The Council needed to ensure that a child's education complied with the Department for Education's guidelines.

Councillor Blackburn asked if safeguarding procedures were adequate. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance responded that if there were any concerns, then home visits would be conducted.

Councillor Duncan asked whether there was a minimum requirement for parents to home school and, if so, whether schools checked that level. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance clarified that there was no requirement in respect of this. The number of EHC was monitored at each school.

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Councillor Whitham asked how new arrivals to the Borough were monitored and captured within the system. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance replied that they would be requested to proceed through the monitoring process and the guidelines of the process were available on the Council's website. Councillor Whitham requested that guidelines be shared and this was agreed.

Councillor Whetton asked if Officers had contact with any parents with an extremist religious position which could affect their education. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance commented that she was not aware of this from an EHC perspective. There was, however, a Panel which scrutinised data and information received by the Council. This allowed the Council to ensure children were not missed. The Corporate Director, Children's Services added that it was the duty of Local Authorities to prevent radicalisation and Trafford had Panels to ensure this.

Councillor Acton asked a question regarding traveller's education as they moved around regularly and how the Council responded to this. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance commented that the Council previously had an offer for minority groups. One of the current Council Officers did have a supportive relationship with them. Traveller sites would be visited but it was difficult to perform those visits with current staff capacity.

Councillor Welton enquired whether there were any networks for EHC parents and how formal they were. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance confirmed that the Council did not hold any rigorous monitoring in respect of this. However, the Council held regular network meetings with EHC parent groups which were very useful and informative.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted;
- 2) Information be circulated to Members on levels of EHC compared to other Local Authorities; and
- 3) Information be shared to Members on how the Council monitored new arrivals and how their education is monitored.

6. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee looked at the draft work programme for 2022/23 and discussed some matters which might be reviewed during this municipal year.

Councillor Welton asked for a report on the current position regarding the bikeability programme to be submitted to the November meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Whitham further asked for a report regarding the provision of childcare support in the Borough be submitted to the September meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

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- 1) That the draft work programme for the 2022/23 municipal year be agreed
- 2) That the suggested items be added to the work programme.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 8:25 pm.