

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY (O&S) COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

1000 hours on Wednesday, 16th September 2020, Online Meeting

Action Notes

Present:

Councillor Kath Scott (Chair)

Councillors: Mohammed Aikhlaq, Safia Akhtar, Kerry Jenkins, Chaudhry Rashid and Alex Yip

Other Voting Representatives: Rabia Shami, Parent Governor Representative and Sarah Smith, Church of England Diocese Representative

Also Present:

Councillor Kate Booth, Cabinet Member for Children's Wellbeing

Jaswinder Didially, Head of Service, Education and Skills

Lisa Fraser, AD, Education and Early Years

Nichola Jones, AD, Inclusion and SEND

Dr Tim O'Neill, Director, Education and Skills

Ceri Saunders, Acting Group Overview and Scrutiny Manager

Kate Squires, SEND Locality, Education and Skills

Amanda Simcox, Scrutiny Officer

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chairman advised that this meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site (www.civico.net/birmingham) and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there were confidential or exempt items.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor Alex Yip declared that his sister works for National Express, who is the parent company for National Express Accessible Transport (NEAT) and he is a Governor at Wilson Stuart School.

Councillor Mohammed Aikhlaq declared an interest as a Director at Leigh Multi Academy Trust.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were submitted on behalf of:

- Councillor Barbara Dring.
- Adam Hardy, Roman Catholic Diocese Representative and Omar Hanif, Parent Governor Representative.

4. ACTION NOTES AND ACTION TRACKER

(See documents 1 and 2).

RESOLVED

The action notes were agreed and the action tracker was noted.

5. COVID-19 IMPACT ON SCHOOLS AND PREPARATIONS FOR RETURN TO SCHOOL IN SEPTEMBER 2020

(See document 3).

Lisa Fraser, AD, Education and Early Years and Jaswinder Didially, Head of Service, Education and Skills, gave the presentation and answered Members' questions.

The following were among the main points raised during the discussion:

- The Council facilitated the DfE Year 10 disadvantaged laptop scheme and allocated c.350 laptops to maintained schools. There will be a second DfE scheme which schools will be able to access in the coming weeks.
- The Council refocused the school improvement contract, delivered by the Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP), to support schools on the provision of on-line learning. This is a key area of work BEP will be taking forward.
- It was queried whether schools had been surveyed to gain feedback on how schools perceived the Council support to them. Members were informed that although a survey had not been undertaken, officers get feedback via the various fora and Trade Unions etc. Also, the Council is in a stronger position than they were prior to Covid-19 as they can reach people in a quicker and more timely way.
- Officers are stretched due to the extra demands and a temporary additional resource would be welcomed.
- Schools are under enormous pressure and the Council has helped schools interpret the directives / guidance from central government as quickly as they possibly can. However, it was acknowledged that schools not always differentiate between local and central government.
- A commitment has been given to support the 27 Special Schools with additional PPE until half term, when the decision will be reviewed.

- Although PPE for the City of Birmingham School (COBS) and the impact was discussed, the Council's Strategic Cell took the decision to provide PPE to Special Schools only.
- The Council's Free School Meals voucher scheme was to be funded from the emergency Covid-19 budget. Unfortunately, schools will now need to pick up these costs due to the budget being overspent. Although, schools can apply to the DfE for additional funding which has occurred throughout the Covid period, the decision has been detrimental to the trust between schools and the Council. Members expressed their concern and will write to the Cabinet Member.
- Currently there are c4,000 children isolating in a Covid bubble out of a cohort of 200,000.
- The test and trace issues have been raised at the Council's Test and Trace Cell and education is seen as a priority, especially in terms of access to tests.
- Birmingham's attendance figure yesterday was 80% and this is better than our core cities and statistical neighbours.
- The Council's communications have focused on encouraging and supporting children back to school and on the positive benefits of being in school.
- To assist with parents' anxieties the Local Attendance Officer's role has been repurposed and they are working with families where attendance has been an issue prior to Covid. Also, a wider range of organisations are working with children's return to school and alleviating anxieties. Lisa Fraser will ensure they are linking with the Education Psychology Team.
- The expansion programme priority is for increasing secondary school places and there is a 2% surplus on primary school places. Officers are working towards the 2021 admissions.

RESOLVED

The committee noted the update and requested the following:

- Regular updates on the schools' inability of staff and pupils to access Covid-19 tests and the number of children and teachers isolating to be provided.
- Jaswinder Didi to come back with the number of school admission appeals this year and the projection for 2021.
- The presentation on online learning to be provided.
- Dr Tim O'Neill undertook to take back the decision to not issue additional PPE to City of Birmingham School (COBS).
- A letter to be sent to the Cabinet Member regarding Member's concerns that schools are being re-charged for the free school meals voucher scheme.

6. SEND RESPONSE TO COVID

(See documents 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10).

Nichola Jones, AD, Inclusion and SEND and Kate Squires, SEND Locality, Education and Skills, gave the presentation and answered Members' questions.

The following were among the main points raised during the discussion:

- The Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) have been bought back in-house and the targets are within the quality assurance framework.
- The recovery framework will take 2 – 3 years, as the issues in Birmingham are deep rooted and it is about changing the culture. There has been a restructure and they will be going out to advert for further support.
- It was the individual schools' responsibility to undertake the 10,000 risk assessments for children with EHCP's. There is about 12% of children without an EHCP who will have some SEND need and it is critical we support them. They are looking at the Local Offer website and to enhance communication.
- Councillor Yip queried whether there was a discrepancy in the answer to written question C8 at City Council. The written answer stated that there were 664 pupils transitioning to post 16 in September 2020 and there were zero remaining assessments. This contrasts with the 91% completed on time in July and 92% on time in August being stated now.
- The AD needed to know if children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) are not having their needs met e.g. quiet rooms are being used for other purposes because of Covid and capacity issues. The AD undertook to take this back to her team so they can discuss this with schools and will report back.
- The Home Bridging Team was established in September 2019 and is a team of seven that work across the six localities in the city.
- Where it is obvious that travel arrangements need to stay in place post 16 then applications do not have to be made and a written report can be sent to the committee.
- The AD is aware of seven children who are awaiting their outcome for travel arrangements and Members will forward the cases they are aware of to the AD.
- The new school bubbles have meant a huge change for travel arrangements. One provider has had huge difficulties in providing the drivers and additional guides. Also, the letters were not sent to parents in a timely manner and the AD apologised for this.
- A compliance officer is starting tomorrow to address issues with the travel providers.
- The IT system is due to be rolled out in a couple of weeks and this will enable parents to track the transport.

RESOLVED

The committee noted the update and the following are to be provided:

- Officers to check and report back on the answer in C8 written question to City Council regarding post 16 and those that are out of time.
- A report on children's needs with SEND not being met in schools because of capacity and Covid.
- A report on the communications and problems that occurred with the new on-line system for bus passes over the summer.
- A report on how schools notify problems with home to school transport to the Council.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document 11).

There was a general discussion about the future work programme and Councillor Kerry Jenkins will get back to the Chair on the Youth Service item at the next meeting.

RESOLVED

- The committee noted the work programme.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 28th October 2020 at 1000 hours via an online meeting.

9. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)

None

10. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

RESOLVED

- An informal meeting of the committee to be arranged to discuss the outcomes of the home to school transport inquiry.

11. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

RESOLVED

That in an urgent situation between meetings the Chair, jointly with the relevant Chief Officer, has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 12.54 hours.