

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING

1000 hours on Wednesday, 18 October 2023, Committee Rooms 3 & 4,

Council House

Minutes

Present:

Councillor Kerry Jenkins (Chair)

Councillors: Jilly Bermingham, Debbie Clancy, Adam Higgs, Des Hughes, and Morriam Jan

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

Also Present:

Councillor Karen McCarthy, Cabinet Member, Children, Young People and Families

Barry Bowles, Chair of the Management Board, City of Birmingham School (COBS)

Tim Boyes, Chief Executive, Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP)

Razia Butt, Director, Thriving Children and Families

Harjinder Dool, AD, Financial Performance and Insight (online)

David Fallows, Head of Performance, Business & Commissioning Intelligence

Sarah Fradgley, Overview and Scrutiny Manager

Sue Harrison, Director, Children and Families

Steve Howell, Head Teacher, COBS

Edwina Langley, Lead Practitioner

Alan Michell, Head of Service, School Admissions, Fair Access and Exclusions

Diane Rhoden, Director of Nursing - Safeguarding & Children in Care, NHS Birmingham and Solihull

Clare Sandland, Finance Business Partner – Children and Young People (online)

Amanda Simcox, Scrutiny Officer

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chair advised that the meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Public-I microsite and that members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received on behalf of Cllr Jane Jones for non-attendance, and Cllr Morriam Jan for lateness.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded they must declare all relevant pecuniary and other registerable interests arising from any business to be discussed at this meeting, and none were declared.

4. MINUTES

(See document No 1)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. COMMISSIONER'S REVIEW AND COMMENTS ON THE AGENDA

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted that no comments had been received from the Commissioner on this agenda.

6. ACTION TRACKER

(See document No 2)

The Chair advised that a Children's and Young People's Travel Service workshop for all councillors was currently being arranged for Thursday, 16 November 2023, and confirmed the Data Workshop for the Committee has been arranged for Monday, 6 November 2023 at 10.30am.

RESOLVED:

That the action tracker was noted.

7. SCRUTINY OF DELIVERY OF 2023/24 BUDGET SAVINGS AND UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO S114 NOTICE AND FINANCIAL RECOVERY PLAN

(See document No 3)

Sue Harrison, Director, Children and Families, Harjinder Dool, AD, Financial Performance and Insight (online), and Clare Sandland, Finance Business Partner – Children and Young People (online) were in attendance for this item.

The Chair updated the Committee on the recent meeting of the Co-ordinating O&S Committee whereby the establishment of a Budget Task & Finish Group comprising Members of the Finance and Resources O&S Committee, plus Chairs of the other O&S Committees was endorsed. The lead Commissioner had indicated support and the terms of reference were being drawn up with Finance Officers. The Chair undertook to update the Committee on the work of the Finance and Resources T&F Group in relation to the Committee's remit and commented that the work programme was flexible to accommodate these discussions.

The meeting was provided with an overview of Appendix 2 and the Chair highlighted the important role of Scrutiny to ensure the Directorate delivers the best services to children and families in need within budget.

During the debate the Director, Children and Families stated the directorate welcomed scrutiny feedback and committed to bringing work at early stages of planning for input by the Committee. Reassurance was given to families that frontline services are continuing as their budgets were protected and ringfenced.

The Committee agreed for future agenda items reports to include a snapshot of the associated spend/budget information, and impact, similar to the report presented for the Young People's Substance Use Service item.

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager provided a summary of research undertaken into the scrutiny function within local authorities subject to a S114 notice or government intervention. She highlighted that scrutiny committees had refocused work programmes on to budget savings, recovery, and improvement plans, so moving forward this is likely to be a theme for Birmingham scrutiny. Research had found scrutiny had played an important role in the improvement process. Member training was a key component and also support provided from CfGS and CIPFA.

RESOLVED:

That:

- The Quarter 1 2023/24 savings set out in Appendix 1 was noted.
- The update for Q2 attached as Appendix 2 was received.
- The implications of recent events on the scrutiny work programme was considered and it was agreed:
 - The Chair to update the Committee on the work of the Finance and Resources Budget T&F Group in relation to the Committee's remit.

- The Director, Children and Families, to bring work at early stages of planning for input by the Committee.
- Future agenda items to include a snapshot of their associated spend/budget and impact.

8. HIDDEN CHILDREN

(See document No. 4)

Sue Harrison, Director, Children and Families, Barry Bowles, Chair of the Management Board, COBS, Tim Boyes, Chief Executive, BEP, Razia Butt, Director, Thriving Children and Families, David Fallows, Head of Performance, Business & Commissioning Intelligence, Steve Howell, Head Teacher, COBS, Edwina Langley, Lead Practitioner, Alan Michell, Head of Service, School Admissions, Fair Access and Exclusions, and Diane Rhoden, Director of Nursing - Safeguarding & Children in Care, were in attendance for this item.

The Chair welcomed the attendees to the meeting and highlighted that school exclusions, part time timetables, and unsuitable school places item had previously been discussed at the 22 February 2023 committee meeting.

Officers presented the report and during the ensuing debate the following points were raised:

Permanent Exclusions and Suspensions

Increases in permanent exclusions is a complex landscape which included worsening behaviours following the pandemic, pressures on school budgets resulting in less support, and changes to DfE guidance. Prevention work included the new staffing resource planned for the Thriving Children and Families division.

BEP

The Committee was informed that BEP was the contracted provider for school improvement and acted on an informal basis to support all schools with permanent exclusion issues through seven Local Sharing Panels. Reassurance was given that whilst this is a national issue, head teachers in the city take school exclusions seriously. The bulk of the work was with secondary schools and each school is part of one of the Local Sharing Panels.

COBS (the Local Authorities Pupil Referral Unit)

COBS was the biggest PRU in the country. Additional secondary provision will be secured by commissioning additional places and reallocating primary places to meet the changing cohort of exclusions. The challenges included the length of the Service Level Agreement (SLA), infrastructure, budgets, and support for children with SEND.

In response to a question regarding capacity at COBS, the meeting was informed that the bigger picture sits with the Inclusion Strategy, and work included preventing exclusions, re-integrating students back into mainstream education more quickly, increasing capacity – and not just at COBS, and looking at quality alternative provision.

The Committee was concerned that COBS was seen by some as the “last chance Saloon” and there may be a stigma associated with attending COBS. Reassurance was provided, to which the meeting was informed that COBS provided high quality teaching based on the national curriculum, and compared well with other PRUs, which is a huge achievement.

There was no generic length of stay for students at COBS, rather decisions were made on a child by child basis. Steve Howell agreed to provide the data on the length of stay at COBS.

The Committee agreed for a visit to COBS to be organised to increase Members’ understanding of the issues raised in the debate.

Attendance Strategy

Officers are working on a new Attendance Strategy which will link with the Inclusion Strategy.

Out of Sight Group

Diane Rhoden is the Chair Out of Sight Group, which is a subgroup of the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP). They work together to identify points they may lose contact / sight of children and young people and identify gaps between universal services.

Children in Elective Home Education (EHE) are of interest to the Out of Sight Group and there is a weekly triage for children they are worried about, which is a multi-agency discussion, and there has been significant improvements in last 6 months.

Children with SEND

In response to the concern of children with SEND being excluded, the Committee was informed that a small proportion of students at COBS have an EHCP, and the importance of the Out of Sight Group with oversight of the BSCP, and support of the Children’s Trust to identify need was also highlighted.

Governance

In response to a question regarding governance arrangements around permanent exclusions decisions, managed moves, reintegration, and preventative work that fell beyond the contractual arrangements with BEP, the meeting was informed that directorate staff were working beyond their job descriptions to facilitate the current work. A more sustainable solution with a team in place in the local authority was required and the Director, Children and Families, suggested the draft plans for this be brought to a future committee meeting for comment.

Next Steps for the Committee

The increase in behavioural problems and speech and language being less developed when children start primary schools can be included in the Early Years Education Entitlement item being discussed at the 17 January 2024 committee meeting.

It was suggested that the Committee should undertake further focused work on EHE, and part time timetables and it was agreed this could be considered after the Child Criminal Exploitation Inquiry had finished in the new year.

The Chair summed up the Committee's deliberations and concluded that alternative provision can be a positive experience which needed proper co-production, she welcomed the commitment shown, and highlighted the Committee's responsibility to scrutinise and follow up on work referenced in the report, due to the importance of removing barriers for children to receive quality education, improve attendance, and meet the needs of children and young people in all forms of education.

Also, a visit to COBS will be organised and Members can forward questions that were not asked during the discussion.

RESOLVED:

That:

- The Committee noted the report.
- The planning for further development of the governance around school exclusions and part time timetables to be brought to a future committee meeting for comment.
- The Head Teacher to provide the data on length of stay of students at City of Birmingham School (COBS).
- A visit of the Committee to COBS to be arranged.
- The Committee to forward any further questions to the Scrutiny Office.
- The increase in behavioural problems and speech and language being less developed when children start primary schools to be included in the Early Years Education Entitlement item being discussed at the 17 January 2024 committee meeting.
- Further focused work on Elective Home Education (EHE) and part time timetables to be considered after the Child Criminal Exploitation Inquiry had finished in the new year.

9. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document No. 6)

The following matters were noted:

The Data workshop for the Committee will take place on the 6th November 2023 at 10.30am.

The Children and Young People's Travel Service Workshop for all Members will take place on 16th November 2023.

The following were agreed:

The review of short breaks item programmed for the November committee meeting will be deferred to a future committee meeting and subject to an interim written update

to be circulated to the Committee, which will include a commitment and timescale for when the review will be completed, and a report can be presented to Committee.

The SEND Commissioner to be invited to attend the November committee meeting.

As suggested by the Director, Children and Families, the school improvement re-design item (school improvement – the new relationship with schools) to be added to the work programme for November committee meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme was agreed and subject to further input from the Chair and Deputy Chair, be submitted to Co-ordinating O&S Committee to enable work to be planned and co-ordinated throughout the year.

10. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED:

The date of the next meeting was 29 November 2023 at 10am.

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

None.

12. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member and officers to provide an update on safeguarding and support being offered to schools in light of what was happening in Israel and Gaza. The Committee was informed that resources sent to schools when the situation in Gaza escalated two years ago had been updated and recirculated, and schools were signposted to the Solution Not Sides organisation for support. Support has been provided; this has mainly been in relation to queries regarding fundraising for children effected.

13. AUTHORITY TO CHAIR AND OFFICERS

RESOLVED:

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 12.12 hours.