

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

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

1000 hours on Wednesday 11th March 2020, Committee Room 6

Actions

Present:

Councillor Kath Scott (Chair)

Councillors: Barbara Dring, Charlotte Hodivala, Kerry Jenkins 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

Rose Kiely, Group Overview and Scrutiny Manager

Lisa Fraser, AD Education & Early Years

Debbie James, Chair of Birmingham Schools Forum

Nichola Jones, AD for Inclusion and SEND

Dr Tim O'Neill, Director for Education and Skills

Rachel O'Connor, Assistant Chief Executive, Birmingham and Solihull CCG

Amanda Simcox, Scrutiny Officer

Paul Stevenson, Interim Finance Business Partner

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

None

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were submitted on behalf of:

- Councillors: Mohammed Aikhlaq, Safia Akhtar and Chauhdry Rashid.

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

4. ACTION NOTES AND ACTION TRACKER

(See documents 1 and 2).

Dr Tim O'Neill, Director, Education and Skills informed members that the outstanding actions on the action tracker will be provided within five working days.

RESOLVED

Confirmed the action notes of the 12th February 2020 and noted the outstanding actions on the action tracker will be provided within five working days.

5. LA SCHOOL DEFICITS REDUCTION

(See document 3)

Dr Tim O'Neill, Director for Education and Skills; Lisa Fraser, AD Education & Early Years; Debbie James, Chair of Birmingham Schools Forum and Paul Stephenson, Interim Finance Business Partner attended for this item.

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

- This represents 420 schools in total.
- There are some £49m in balances held across all schools.
- The council has both a supportive role to help with school deficits and a challenging role if there is a school which does not seem to be taking the action needed to control their budget.
- School Financial Services has around 40 staff that go out to schools to assist with the school budget monitoring and keep track of the finances.
- There has been an exceptional high level of deficits this year, some of which has been paid off.
- The school is not responsible for their deficit if they covert to an academy and therefore there is a potential risk to the council.
- The Schools Forum is engaged to give a collective responsibility for school deficits.
- School Improvement is currently delivered by the Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) and the contract will expire in August 2020. The new contract will be looking at sector led school improvement / school to school improvement. This is contained within the two page plan which will be provided to the committee.
- The Chair of the Schools Forum informed members of the need for a greater understanding of why a school has a surplus balance. The Chair believes that

current money should be used for current students. However, the school also needs to look at the longer term and an example was given of repairs needed to the school building.

- The Schools Forum is also concerned about school deficits and part of the way deficits are funded is through the contingency fund that maintained schools contribute to. Falling pupils for primary schools will mean that some schools will be in a difficult position financially and this is outside the school's remit. Plus, there are other costs such as increasing on costs for support staff and this may affect special schools more as they usually have a higher number of support staff.
- There is an emerging issue for schools that are pink rated¹ and this group may grow quickly. Therefore, there needs to be the support to prevent the schools having unmanageable deficits.
- The pension issue has been raised at the Schools Forum and the Director feels this needs a council response and will come back to scrutiny in more detail if required.

RESOLVED

The committee noted the update.

6. SEND

(See documents 4 and 5).

Dr Tim O'Neill, Director for Education and Skills, Rachel O'Connor, Assistant Chief Executive, Birmingham and Solihull CCG and Nichola Jones, AD for Inclusion and SEND attended for this item.

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

- The improvement programme has been in place for approximately 18 months. They have got traction and can demonstrate improvements. However, there are some embedded practices that they need to turnaround.
- In the last quarter a significant amount of work has focused on:
 - Early help and support: been tested and will be evaluated before being rolled out.
 - Waiting times: they have prioritised three clinical pathways to be reduced.
 - Communication and engagement: the need to get the key messages out to families, schools and partners. The newsletter and the role of the Parent Carer Forum (PCF) and the new parent link officers in the localities is important and will help. They have also done a lot of co-design with the PCF and the Local Offer website was a big issue and

¹ Schools that have currently got an in-year deficit and their surplus balances from previous years are reducing.

was not fully compliant or provided accessible information. The new Local Offer is due to go live on the 31st March 2020 and this has been done in partnership with Health, Children's Trust and the City Council and the PCF with regards to key messages on the work they are doing.

- The CCG has invested in their neurodevelopmental pathway and will go live on 1st April 2020.
 - Through the designated clinical officer and commissioning officer they have been rolling out training regarding the SEND code of practice.
- They are monitoring via the SEND dashboard, which includes home to school transport and this has been a huge improvement and gives a clearer line of sight across the key metrics and standards for SEND. This can be shared with scrutiny.
- They have strengthened the Improvement Board and governance.
- Areas of escalation:
 - The long waiting times especially for Speech and Language Therapy and they have gone back to the Community Health Care Trust for them to urgently look at different models of delivery.
 - The quality of the EHCPs and they have monthly audits and extra resources has been put into the SENAR Team, with each plan being signed off by a senior manager against a quality check list.
 - The annual reviews of the EHCPs and they are working with schools and extra capacity has been put in place to review the 10,000 plans.
 - Good quality communication and they are working with the PCF and they have a workshop programmed in April where they will be looking at co-production and also getting the messages out about the PCF.
- They are preparing for the new inspection as it is likely this will take place in May or June 2020.
- The Inclusion Team and the Health Team are working alongside each other to support early interventions. They have had 79 individual school meetings and all the schools have highly rated these. Therefore, they feel the general direction of travel is welcomed.
- This month they are rolling out the Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) forums and preparing for the drop-in events for schools where access to therapists and advisory teachers are made available.
- It was queried whether the parent link officers were or will be legally trained. Members were informed that they have put in place two parent link officers, who are principal officers from the SENAR Team with experience of the legislation. When they recruit further down the line the new posts will continue to be well versed in the legislation and code of practice. An on-line training tool has been developed and is monitored as part of the SEND Dashboard.

- Launched the new contact line for parents so parents can get immediate advice and they have had 68 cases so far with typical requests for information and support.
- They have recruited three parent champions that are being supported through a training programme.
- There have been three meetings with the newly established SEND Pupil Forum.
- The impact on families on the ground is being monitored and they continue to do the quarterly parent carer survey to get an honest reflection.
- Progress with the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) was shared in a summary format in the written presentation. It was agreed that the WSOA action plan and progress against this will be shared with the committee in more detail.
- Councillor Yip made reference to the RAG action tracker members received in December 2018 and raised concerns that they were now two thirds into implementation stage 2 with significant tracked items outstanding.
- Concerns were raised regarding Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP's) and this included the number, quality, compliance with the 20 weeks requirement and number of appeals.
- It was queried whether the new locality model was possibly being rolled out without sufficiently bringing people along with the journey together.
- It was questioned whether the new locality model was a change in policy or a change to delivery. The AD, Inclusion and SEND informed members that the integration of the teams is to make them more effective and is an internal structure that most authorities that are achieving good results are doing.
- Councillor Jenkins stated that parents should know clearly what their legal entitlement is and sought clarification on the continued role of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Information Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS).
- Members were informed that SENDIASS is usually involved when the families are on the cusp of breakdowns in relationships and they do not have the capacity to provide the early help. SENDIASS needs to be integrated and challenging the teams on what is and not working to drive improvement.
- The Cabinet Member stated that she is delighted with the work that has been done. The inspection was pretty damning and before that there had been a churn of staff across the directorate. We are now beginning to see a process working for children and their families.
- The Cabinet Member will be meeting with the PCF six times a year.
- The PCF has seven members and it was questioned how they will be supported to make them more robust when they are taking on board co-production and are the voice of the parents. The Cabinet Member informed

the committee that there are about 10,000 children so they hope more parents will want to join. The AD, Inclusion and SEND commented that there will also be other ways such as the parent link officers and parent champions that will assist.

- Through the individual schools meetings they talk about the notional SEND budget and how this is currently being spent and working with some of the SENCOS they are discussing school to school support and what good looks like.
- The Chair asked the Cabinet Member whether there is anything that scrutiny can help to add value and the Cabinet Member will discuss this with officers and come back to scrutiny.

RESOLVED

- The committee noted the update and the following is to be provided:
 - SEND Dashboard.
 - The WSoA Action Plan and progress against this.
 - More information on the SEND Pupil Forum

7. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document 5).

The Chair advised members that there will be an additional formal committee meeting in April 2020 and this is included in the attached work programme.

The Chair also advised that the Home to School Transport Inquiry draft report has been sent to the Executive and witnesses for comments. An informal meeting has been arranged for the 24th March 2020 for the Committee to agree the final report that will go to Full Council. Councillor Jenkins queried whether the meeting can be held at Woodcock Street instead of the Council House.

RESOLVED

The committee noted the work programme.

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

None.

9. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

10. 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 12.11 hours.