

**BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

**EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING**

**1000 hours on Wednesday, 6 September 2023, Committee Rooms 3 & 4,**

**Council House**

**Minutes**

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**Present:**

Councillor Kerry Jenkins (Chair)

Councillors: Jilly Bermingham, Adam Higgs, Morriam Jan, Jane Jones and Shehla Moledina

Other Representatives: Osamugi Ogbe, Parent Governor

**Also Present:**

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

Janie Berry, City Solicitor

Fiona Bottrill, Senior Overview and Scrutiny Manager

Andy Couldrick, Chief Executive, Birmingham Children's Trust

David Fallows, Head of Performance, Business & Commissioning Intelligence

Sarah Fradgley, Overview and Scrutiny Manager

Fiona Greenway, Interim Assistant Director, Financial Performance and Insight

Sue Harrison, Strategic Director, Children and Young People

Mohammed Sajid, Interim Head of Financial Strategy

Christian Scade, Head of Scrutiny and Committee Services

Adrian Weissenbruch, Assistant Director, Children and Young People's Travel Service

**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 Des Hughes, Cllr Debbie Clancy, Justine Lomas, Roman Catholic Diocese, Sarah Smith Church of England Diocese, and Rabia Shami, Parent Governor Representative.

**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 19 July 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**5. ACTION TRACKER**

(See document No 2)

The Committee noted the draft SEND Sufficiency Strategy would be available by the end of the year.

**RESOLVED:**

That the action tracker be noted.

## **6. PERFORMANCE UPDATE**

(See document No 3)

Sue Harrison, Strategic Director, Children and Young People and David Fallows Head of Performance, Business & Commissioning Intelligence presented the report and outlined the directorate's new performance framework for improving the collection and use of performance data.

The meeting was provided an overview of the Children and Families corporate performance indicators and during the debate the following points were raised:

### **Workforce Update**

The Directorate was working with managers to improve data collection on staff sickness absence to reduce the number of cases recorded as 'unknown.'

Sue Harrison undertook to provide further details of the mental health element of the Employment Support Programme and also clarify whether percentage figures contained in the report for reasons for absence were the percentage of days lost, or the percentage of people sick for that reason.

### **Transport Service**

Adrian Weissenbruch, AD, Children and Young People's Travel Service reported that 100% of the 1004 pupil transport routes had run that day, with one route recorded as late. Additional hearing dates had been arranged to speed up the transport appeals process, with the remaining 70 SEN appeals to be held over the next few weeks. The Committee thanked Adrian and the Travel Service Team for their continued efforts to improve the service.

### **Early Years Education Entitlement**

The Committee considered suggested areas for further scrutiny and agreed to timetable a deep dive into Early Years Education Entitlement for 2 and 3-4 years olds for January 2024 as performance was currently below target. The Chair felt it was important for O&S members to understand what work was being undertaken to increase take up rates, how this work was being informed, and the impact of new strategies.

Sue Harrison advised that the team were piloting a range of activities to understand what strategies worked and learning from inner London authorities with higher take up. The Cabinet Member confirmed the work was informed by the BLASHIR report and stressed the importance of alerting parents of the opportunities and the benefits of taking up the offer of Early Years Education.

### **School Absence Rates**

Sue Harrison reported that schools absence rates remained a concern and up to date figures were being calculated. The Directorate was working with a DFE Advisor,

supporting schools, and developing a city-wide attendance strategy with head teachers. The meeting acknowledged the range of reasons for pupil absence that would be explored as part of the Hidden Children session planned for the October committee meeting. The Child Criminal Exploitation Task and Finish Group had recently discussed the link between school absence and risk of exploitation.

### **Future Performance Reports**

Member's views were sought on the level of detail to include in future performance reports and it was agreed that the proposed Member Data Workshop would provide the opportunity for further discussion about what data was available and how members would like that presented to Committee.

### **RESOLVED:**

That:

- The report and presentation be noted.
- Further discussions relating to the focus and format of performance data presented to the Committee be considered at the Member Data Workshop (to be arranged).
- Information on mental health element of Employment Support Programme be provided to Members.
- An explanation be given to Members as to whether the percentage figures for the most common reason for staff sickness absence related to days lost to sickness, or the percentage of people sick for each reason.

## **7. FINANCIAL CHALLENGES – SCRUTINY CONTRIBUTION TO THE BUDGET SAVINGS AND RECOVERY PLAN**

(See document No. 4)

The Chair announced a change to the proposed agenda item in light of the issuing of the Section 114 Notice by the Section 151 Officer.

Fiona Greenway, Interim Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer, outlined the reasons for the issuing of the S114 notice that required all non-essential spending to stop and financial spend controls would be applied to all services. The Council would honour existing contractual commitments and pay staff and contractors and key services to children and vulnerable people were not affected. In view of the new governance arrangements a process map of how the business of the council will be managed was being developed, including the role of Scrutiny.

Responding to questions from Members, Fiona Greenway advised that the Finance Control Board was working with Legal Services on defining statutory and non-statutory

services and would take into account the benefits non-statutory services had on reducing demand for and costs of statutory services.

It was suggested discussion on the savings report published with the agenda be deferred. The meeting acknowledged that work to examine budget savings was still needed but the issuing of the S114 had superseded the level of debate at the current time.

The Chair invited Sue Harrison, Strategic Director, Children's Services, and the Cabinet Member to outline the implications of the S114 Notice on the delivery of the services so they might offer some assurance to the public, service users, parents, and schools. They confirmed that all services would continue as normal, all staff were at work and contracted services would be paid. Sue Harrison praised the way staff had responded to the news and agreed to send Members a copy of her communications with head teachers and staff.

Andy Couldrick, Chief Executive, Birmingham Children's Trust reassured the meeting its services continued. The Trust was working with the Directorate to understand the implications of the notice on its Trust status and was exercising the same spending restrictions as Birmingham City Council.

The meeting expressed the importance of non-statutory early help and intervention services that helped children, young people, and families with issues before they became a crisis need that required statutory services.

Sue Harrison advised that the Directorate would continue with its planned service reviews looking creatively at how services could be delivered differently and more efficiently whilst also achieving outcomes. She felt it was important to involve the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at an early stage to help shape proposals, rather than presenting oven-ready plans. The Chair welcomed the opportunity to be part of the process to help the Directorate with this work.

**RESOLVED:**

- That the report presented to the committee be noted.
- The information presented to the committee regarding the issuing of the Section 114 Notice be noted.

**8. WORK PROGRAMME**

(See document No. 6)

The following matters were noted:

The Hidden Children item deferred this month would now be considered in October 2023.

It was agreed to add the SEND Sufficiently Strategy and the Early Years Education Entitlement Deep Dive items to January 2024.

The Child Criminal Exploitation Inquiry had expanded its evidence gathering and was expected to report to City Council in January 2024.

The Children and Young People's Mental Health Inquiry had collected a wide range of evidence to inform its recommendations.

**RESOLVED:**

- That the information set out in Appendix 1 be noted.
- That subject to further input from the Chair and Deputy Chair, the SEND Sufficiently Strategy and the Early Years Education Entitlement Deep Dive items be added to work programme for January 2024.

**9. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

**RESOLVED:**

The date of the next meeting is 18 October 2023 at 10am.

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

None.

**11. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

**Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC)**

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member to provide an update on the emerging situation relating to new Government measures for Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in education settings and asked whether any Birmingham schools were affected. The Cabinet Member advised the DFE had formally notified of four schools, but she expected more would be identified. She advised that the Directorate was working with the schools on practical measures, and she urged other schools to get in touch.

**12. 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.

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The meeting ended at 11.12 hours.