

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

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

1000 hours on Wednesday, 19th May 2021, Online Meeting

Action Notes

Present:

Councillor Kath Scott (Chair)

Councillors: Mohammed Aikhlaq, Olly Armstrong, Barbara Dring, Charlotte Hodivala
Kerry Jenkins and Alex Yip

Other Voting Representatives: Sarah Smith, Church of England Diocese

Also Present:

Councillor Ian Ward, Leader

Councillor Kate Booth, Cabinet Member for Children's Wellbeing

Councillor Jayne Francis, Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Culture

David Bridgman, Head of Service, Special Educational Needs Assessment & Review
(SENAR)

Deborah Brooks, Transformation Director, Commissioning

Jaswinder Didially, Head of Service, Education and Skills

Lisa Fraser, AD, Education and Early Years

Mary Jefferson, Head of Service, Home to School Transport

Nichola Jones, AD, Inclusion and SEND

Ceri Saunders, Acting Group Overview and Scrutiny Manager

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. APOLOGIES

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Omar Hanif, Parent Governor Representative for attendance, and Councillors Olly Armstrong and Charlotte Hodivala for lateness.

Councillor Alex Yip declared an interest as he is the vice chair of governors at Wilson Stuart School.

3. HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT UPDATE

(See documents No. 1 and No. 2)

Councillor Ian Ward introduced the item and referred to the report that had been circulated with the papers. The Leader highlighted that the task and finish group that he chairs was set up to drive forward improvements and to ensure that implementing the recommendations contained within the EY report was inclusive and cooperative. Attendees included representatives, such as head teachers, the Chair of the Parent Carer Forum and parents and carers. A further public meeting to discuss how the home to school transport service will operate from September 2021 will be held.

Mary Jefferson gave the presentation that complements the report and the main points included:

- Safeguarding: there is a central record for the enhanced DBS checks, and this lines up with the valid dates on the ID badge that should be displayed at all times. The new Compliance Team undertakes unannounced compliance spot checks and there is a penalty points regime. They also undertake weekly Sitreps (situation reports) that contains a lot of detail, for instance details of the DBS checks that are due to expire. In addition, there has been a safeguarding stocktake and these will continue to regularly take place.
- Complaints: they report on the timeliness of responses to parents and Mary reviews the complaint responses and amendments are made where necessary. There will be changes to the formal complaints process, and complaints or comments via other routes are not currently recorded as a complaint. This will change and they expect to see an increase in the number of complaints as a result.

The main points made during the discussion with Members included:

- Deborah Brooks informed Members that safeguarding is absolutely a priority. They have brought together colleagues within the Council and have gone through the issues and all the processes. They have a number of actions to further improve this and provide assurances, and they will be meeting six weekly going forward. They will also be developing a flowchart for parents and schools to show how they can raise a safeguarding issue.
- There are currently two safeguarding issues being investigated.
- Complaints come from a number of sources, such as schools, parents, drivers, guides or witnesses etc. They have re-written the code of guidance and have stepped up the training. In addition to the training given by the providers they are discussing with a school specific training to meet the individual pupils needs.
- The weekly situation reports are used to determine what needs to be addressed immediately and what needs a longer term strategy.

- There is a new Compliance Team that undertakes the safeguarding spot checks. These unannounced spot checks are undertaken on a daily basis where possible. These are also about encouraging the operator to improve their practice.
- Whether there is a report that includes the outcomes of the spot checks and any incidences that have been reported back which could be used when re-procuring the service etc: Officers can potentially adapt the situation report to capture the key headlines for this.
- Training and refresher training: any training that is undertaken will have a repeat date as appropriate. Officers will take this back to the stocktake group and pull together the types of training and the relevant dates. The Chair commented that this needs to be monitored via the KPIs and it should include attendance of the training provided by the employer and that which is provided by the Council etc.
- Soft complaints and the importance of reporting to gauge the patterns and key issues that are affecting parents: officers have started this piece of work and they can bring this back to the Committee.

Councillor Kate Booth apologised to the children and parents for problems with the service and thanked the Leader and the previous Interim Chief Executive for the significant investment into the service. The Cabinet Member also thanked the parents, carers and officers etc., who have invested their time and energy in supporting the improvement journey. The highlights included:

- Since March 2021 99% - 100% of the routes have been delivered.
- The Home to School Transport Team are working with the Clean Air Zone (CAZ) team to capture any initial impact on journey times.
- They have pulled together Frequently Asked Questions (FAQS) and this is due to be launched on the Local Offer website.

The main points made during the discussion with Members included:

- Contract management: they have some capacity that they will be injecting into contract management, and they will be working closely with the schools and addressing issues through informal and formal meetings.
- Length of journeys: they have plotted the routes that have gone out to tender, and operators are invited to come back with alternative routes. These will be checked to ensure compliance with statutory guidance. Also, the routes may take a couple of weeks to bed in.
- They are investing in risk assessment officers as there may be specific needs for longer waiting times to be applied when some children are being picked up for school. This will impact on journey times so they will not be applying this across the board.
- Councillor Alex Yip raised the concern that some children have not yet had their school place confirmed or some have been agreed late and this will have an effect on home to school transport.

- They have employed a mobilisation manager who has just started. Their work includes ensuring September works as smoothly as possible, considering traffic volumes increase, and the letters that go out to parents etc.
- The Leader thanked Councillor Kath Scott for chairing the Committee and commented that O&S can add value to the Council's operations.

The update was noted and:

- Officers will soon have a roll out plan for the 365 response and this will be communicated very shortly. The Chair requested an update in June 2021.
- Integrated Transport Unit (ITU): officers are currently undertaking scoping activity and it was agreed an update to the Committee could be provided in the Autumn.

4. HUNTERS HILL COLLEGE UPDATE

(See document No. 3)

Councillor Kate Booth, Cabinet Member for Children's Wellbeing, Councillor Jayne Francis, Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Culture, David Bridgman, Head of SENAR, Lisa Fraser, AD, Education and Early Years, Jaswinder Didially, Head of Service, Education and Skills, and Nichola Jones, AD, Inclusion and SEND were in attendance for this item.

David Bridgman and Jaswinder Didially gave the presentation and the main points made during the presentation included:

- The on roll figures change on a daily basis and this has reduced to 66 as of today. They have identified 63 interim placements and it is anticipated that the majority of these will become permanent.
- The intention was to look for permanent places but there were serious issues that prevented pupils returning to the school site and therefore they have been looking for temporary placements.
- The formal consultation with staff concluded on 4 May 2021.
- They have started the decommissioning of the buildings (ground floor windows and doors have been boarded up etc.) and this process will continue with the other buildings that are no longer used moving forward.
- Cropwood Trustees have been kept up to date and they are due to go back to them on the 15th June 2021. Any future use of the site will be referred to them for approval and they are working on an options appraisal.
- There will be a clear audit trail for the disposal of the equipment on site.
- 51 pupils are regularly attending their interim placements and work is ongoing to finalise start dates and secure consistent attendance in respect of the remaining pupils with identified placements.

- Attendance across all the age groups was circa 86% and given the nature of the cohort this is reasonable in the circumstances.
- The cost of the interim placements is consistent with the current funding levels at Hunters Hill.
- They have been seeking feedback from the pupils and this has been positive and reflects the care in selecting the interim placements.
- SENAR and the Home Bridging Team will continue to monitor pupil attendance and engagement for all pupils in interim placements or receiving home tuition.
- There will be a dedicated officer in SENAR to coordinate the ongoing tracking and monitoring of the pupils to ensure the placements remain sustainable and viable.

The main points made during the discussion with Members included:

- Remote learning is not the Council's preferred option unless it is unavoidable and the only option the parents will accept. This is a case for a small number of year 11 pupils because they either don't want tutors attending the home or they do not want to have another transition.
- The recent Ofsted monitoring inspection visit in March 2021 did raise concerns of the quality of the on-line offer and a lack of pupil engagement with remote learning: the leadership has taken steps to address this with each individual package being tailored to the young person, and this is an interim measure.
- The monitoring visit also raised issues that included safeguarding and the senior leadership have put in a lot of effort into the EHCPs etc., and things have moved on quite considerably since then.
- How many of the placements are nearer and how many placements are further away from the pupil's home: officers have got details of the distance although there has been some movement due to some children having moved out of the area.
- There are challenges nationally with regards to annual reviews and compliance with statutory timescales for EHCPs, and Birmingham is no exception. All the children in Hunters Hill College had their EHCP meetings before the end of March 2021 in conjunction with individual meetings with parents regarding placements. Officers haven't met all the statutory timescales in relation to finalising plans within four weeks of the annual review papers being received. This is largely because of the transition from interim to permanent placements.
- It is important that the Committee have sight of the tracking of pupils to permanent placements.
- There has been a huge amount of work undertaken to secure the appropriate interim placements focusing on what was best for the pupils, and all providers are rated as good.

The update was noted and Officers to provide and update on:

- Travelling times/distance for pupils to their interim and permanent places (including how many pupils have and have not reduced their travelling).
- How long it has taken to get pupils into interim placements and how long it has taken to convert these to permanent placements.

5. WORK PROGRAMME

(See document No. 4)

The Chair reflected on the work of the Committee and thanked Members and officers for their support and dedication.

The priorities and items of interest highlighted for future meetings:

- The health aspects of EHCPs (to include the process and commitment of health).
- Joint working with the Health and Adults Social Care O&S Committee regarding mental health during Covid.
- How mainstream schools have coped with the return to school and the pressures.
- Councillor Yip requested the Committee ask the Executive to undertake an independent inquiry into the Hunters Hill College, to include the background and the journey and it was recommended that this is discussed by the Committee at a formal meeting.

6. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

The meeting ended at 12.32 hours.