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SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL - STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL PLACES

Meeting: 27 January 2022

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Linda Holt (Chair) in the chair; Councillors Anna Charles-Jones, Gary Lawson and Becky Senior.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors and Officers were invited to declare any interests which they had in any of the agenda items for the meeting.

No interests were declared.

2. SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL PROCEDURE RULES

A representative of the Strategic Head of Service (Legal & Democratic Governance and Monitoring Officer) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) requesting the Panel to formally adopt the Scrutiny Review Panel Procedure Rules for the review.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

3. SCOPING REPORT: SCRUTINY REVIEW - STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL PLACE - PUPIL PLACE PLANNING IN THE BOROUGH

The Director of Education submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) which aimed to assist the Panel to scope the review and determine the areas which they wish to explore and scrutinise further as part of the review of the Strategy for School Places.

The Director of Education informed the Panel that the Council had an enduring statutory responsibility to commission sufficient high quality school places and that residents had a good choice of schools with high standards with 86% of Stockport schools rated Good or Outstanding and that over 96% of residents have secured a school place at one of their first 3 preferences.

Members welcomed the report and thanked the officers for the details in the report.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

4. SCRUTINY REVIEW - PRESENTATION: PUPIL PLACE PLANNING

The Director of Education submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing details relating to the school places in the borough.

Chris Harland (School Places Admissions & Transport Manager) attended the meeting to respond to Members' questions: -

School Place Sufficiency

The following comments were made/issues raised: -

- Given the SEND provision costs £3.5m, how would that impact on the provisions needed for the next 5 years. In response, it was commented that the obligation to provide travel assistance could only get worse and it needed to be corrected financially.
- The Panel enquired about the assistance and support provided to secondary schools through these challenges. It was noted that Head teachers were being engaged across the borough regarding flexibility, investment and were open to discussions.
- It was noted that the situation needed to be managed with agile responses into responding to the challenges as much as possible.
- It was commented that there was an emerging trend in schools relating to disabilities and SEND provisions and that the demand would increase year on year.

Pupil Place Planning

The following comments were made/issues raised: -

- Clarification was sought regarding the balance between meeting capacity needs and factors out of the Council's control and the impact on quality of schools being built. It was noted that the relationship with schools was important with a level of flexibility in its approach to discuss sufficiency and challenges in any area.
- School Place Planning has always been complicated and would continue to be a challenge especially in policy e.g. Academies agenda.
- Maintaining good working relationships with the Department for Education is also important to deal with challenges and projections.

Condition

The following comments were made/issues raised: -

- Clarification was sought regarding the maintenance programme and how regular it was e.g. every 5 years or was it a matter for waiting till Heads and Governors brought matters to the attention of the Council. In response, it was noted that the maintenance programme was reactive to when a school raised an issue and then there was also a rolling programme that involved a survey every 5 years maximum looking at adaptations for accessibility etc. Currently it was being looked at to reduce that programme down to 3 years taking into account the implications on revenue and capital costs.

Net Capacity - Secondary

The following comments were made/issues raised: -

- It was noted that creating more places comes with its own challenges, as it needed to work for Stockport residents and not other boroughs.
- The Panel enquired about what could be done for children who don't engage with traditional education and how would it be done in terms of the provision. In response, it

was noted that there needed to be a different blend in terms of provision e.g. pupil referral units, vocation offers and alternative provisions in existing schools.

- It was commented that there was a lot of work going on nationally with changes coming in the future relating to the vocational offer post-16 with statutory alternative provisions.

Net Capacity – Primary

The following comments were made/issues raised: -

There were challenges between the borough and the local area and how it interacted and would become more of a concern unless the council was able to look at things in the long term and plan ahead. It was also noted that there was variability in the numbers that could be managed across the borough e.g. infant class size limit. But there were challenges in regards to having the data and interpreting the data accordingly.

SEND

The following comments were made/issues raised: -

- It was noted that there was a challenge to forward plan for the broader scope of children with disabilities and more complex needs across the borough.
- There was a focus on meeting the needs to parents and was an area for positive choices for parents to make and not just one place to go and this would be the success measure for there to be a range of choices for parents.
- The SEND provision in Stockport was not as good as it should be but would become a priority. It was noted that the SEND provision in Stockport is really good in terms of quality, but the challenge was centred around keeping pace with the demand and the acceleration of the demand across the full spectrum.

Prioritisation

The following comments were made/issues raised: -

- Regarding SEND provisions, there seemed to be a good grasp of the issues and concerns and the push for choices for parents was welcomed by the Panel.
- Clarification was sought regarding the concerns regarding 'preference' and how it impacted the issues raised. In response, it was noted that it would be a key line of enquiry in the next session.

The Chair noted the challenges ahead with SEND and the repurposing of sites. It was important to keep people together in the communities going forward as this would support the success of pupil placement.

The Panel encouraged officers to continue bidding for funding to support the various programmes including the maintenance programme.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and the officers be thanked for presenting the information and the detailed data.

5. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

There were no further questions.

6. DATES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED – That the Strategic Head of Service (Legal & Democratic Governance and Monitoring Officer) be authorised to determine the date for the next meeting of the Panel in consultation with the Chair and the Panel members.

The meeting closed at 8.05 pm.