

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 6 September 2023

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Colin Foster (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Janet Mobbs (Vice-Chair); Councillors Jake Austin, Dallas Jones, Becky Senior, Leah Taylor, David Wilson, Wendy Wild and Dr Chris Gordon (Church of England Diocesan Education Committee Representative).

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 14 June 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors and officers were invited to declare any interest which they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

The following interest was declared:-

Personal Interests

Councillors

Interests

Leah Taylor

Agenda Item 5 – ‘Working Together to Improve School Attendance: Implementation of the new school attendance guidance’ as an employee of St Matthew’s Primary School.

Co-Opted Member

Dr Chris Gordon

Agenda Item 4 – ‘Schools Strategy’ as the Chair of the Stockport Disability Forum

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. SCHOOLS STRATEGY

A representative of the Director of Education, Work and Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing details relating to an opportunity to define, refine and reorganise our thinking and our approach to ensure that we have a school system which is fit for purpose, sustainable, able to respond to the needs of children in our borough and meet the requirements of the current national policy agenda.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

Main Report

- Members enquired about the challenges with SEND and the proposal for Hazel Grove relating to neurodiversity needs. In response, it was stated that the Free School will be open to all with places being commissioned for those with SEND needs.
- Members welcomed the report and clarification was sought on whether it has been communicated with partners and schools. It was noted that the strategy has been communicated with partners and local schools and there has been ongoing discussions.
- Clarification was sought regarding the responsibilities of the Academies and those that are failing. In response, it was commented that in the first instance it would be the DfE in terms of Ofsted, but the local authority would have responsibility for the building if that failed.
- Concern was expressed regarding the growing number of children experiencing fixed term (FTE) and permanent exclusions (PE). It was stated that following Covid, the increase continues in FTE and PE but there has been a lot of work going into monitoring and bringing those figures down. It was stated that the Exclusion data will be provided to the Committee following the meeting.
- Members enquired about the inclusions policies and pathways for learning post-14. In response, it was stated that the offer to children was inclusive for all children and that is why the strategy has been produced to develop and create the partnerships and develop Stockport Family further through the strategy.
- Clarification was asked about the current state of the Stockport Schools and their Academy status. It was stated that the details would be provided to the Committee following the meeting.

Appendix One – Draft Stockport Schools Strategy 2023-2028

- Clarification was sought relating to the Local Multi-Academy Trusts. In response, it was stated that it meant a number of Multi-Academy Trusts (MAT) based in Stockport. This was important that Local Academies were part of the Stockport Schools ethos and had the Stockport children's best interests at the heart of what they did and the progress.
- The Co-opted Member enquired about the number of Academies in Stockport and the capacity and resource to become part of the MAT. In response, it was stated that there was no timescales to do it quickly, but to do it properly and working with all partners to grow the Academies and develop new capacity.
- It was stated that to ensure there was the best deal for Stockport children, children with SEND category are less likely to need additional support. There were around 2,500 children with EHCP and 8,000 children on free school children. Another 2,000 children were on the edge of free school meals out of a total of 40k children in Stockport schools.
- It was noted that the intention was to focus on the positive outcomes for the children of Stockport and there will be changes to reflect the views of Scrutiny before it goes to Cabinet and it was not intended to mask the details in the draft report.

Appendix Two – Data and Performance

No questions.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Director of Education provide further details to the Committee relating to Exclusion data and the current state of the Stockport Schools and their Academy status (Primary and Secondary).

5. WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW SCHOOL ATTENDANCE GUIDANCE

A representative of the Director of Education, Work and Skills submitted a report (copies of which were circulated) providing an overview of the new expectations on schools, Local Authorities, trusts, and governing boards examine the extent to which Stockport has made progress in line with the expectations as set out in the guidance and outline next steps.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/issues raised:-

- Members enquired about the ‘virtual school’ and the responsibility of ‘children with a social worker’. In response, it was commented that a grant had been awarded for extended duties for the ‘virtual school’ and the team were well placed to take on the extended duties.
- Concern was expressed relating to school absences and mental health but welcomed the details in the report and the work being done.
- Clarification was sought relating to ongoing training and guidance for the model to continue to succeed. It was noted that the tools are updated and it is monitored annually to ensure it is refreshed.
- Additional resource has also been made available in schools to support mental health in schools.
- It was stated that the education supervisions orders tool would be explored to support schools and parents and interventions but would be improved on in comparison to the national picture.
- Members sought clarification on the disparity between effective partnerships for some schools and the learning being proposed in the report. In response it was noted that the core of the school model was working with the schools and it was continuing to be evolved.
- Members enquired about the children from ‘out of borough’ who attended Stockport Schools and the data. In response, it was stated that this continues to be monitored and with key partners meeting the needs of those children. Data was also being reviewed, but Stockport was able to segregate the levels relating to children from out of borough attending Stockport schools and this information could be made available in the autumn.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the Director of Education provide the data relating to children from 'out of borough' who attended Stockport Schools in the autumn.

6. FAIRER START LOCAL NESTA-STOCKPORT PARTNERSHIP

A representative of the Director of Education, Work and Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing information relating to the 'Fairer Start Local' – Nesta and Stockport/Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) Innovation Partnership, and the direction of travel to achieve our goal of 'a consolidated and enhanced early years delivery model' and to provide an insight into our ambitions for improvement, and how we intend to innovate locally to improve outcomes.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

Members enquired about the reference to FMP and the principles they to go integrate this.

It was stated that it was an intensive programme that couldn't be replicated in Stockport, but taking the learning and developing the relationships with parents and focussing on the parent/child relationship and development.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

7. PORTFOLIO DASHBOARDS

The Scrutiny Committee had the opportunity to consider the portfolio dashboards for the Children, Families & Education portfolio and raise any issues with regard to performance.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education (Councillor Wendy Meikle) attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – That the portfolio dashboard be noted.

8. AGENDA PLANNING

A representative of the Assistant Director - Legal & Democratic Governance submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out the planned agenda items for the Scrutiny Committee's next meeting and any relevant Forward Plan items.

Councillor Mobbs provided the Committee with an update relating to the Scrutiny Review and a recent Scoping Meeting held to agree the aims and objectives of the Scrutiny Review and the dates for the review meetings.

Members enquired about the outstanding responses from the last meeting. In response, it was noted that the response had been circulated to Democratic Services and would be shared with the Committee.

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Councillor Meikle informed the Committee that the Care Leavers and Protected Characteristics report would be submitted to the next meeting.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the outstanding responses from the last meeting be shared with the Committee.

The meeting closed at 7.30pm.