

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 28 February 2024

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Colin Foster (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Janet Mobbs (Vice-Chair); Councillors Shan Alexander, Angie Clark, Dallas Jones, 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 17 January 2024 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 interests were declared:-

Personal Interests

Councillor/ Co-opted Member

Interest

Dr Chris Gordon

Any item relating to disabilities as Chair of the Stockport Disability Forum.

Leah Taylor

Agenda Item 6 – ‘SEND Update – SEMH, Alternative Provisions and EHCP’ as she had a child on the SEND Pathway and children who had an Education, Health and Care Plan.

Wendy Wild

Agenda Item 5 – ‘School Investment Plan’ as a governor at Cake Green Primary School.

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. STOCKPORT SKILLS PLAN

The Director of Education, Work & Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) outlining the Work and Skills Plan which was fundamental to establishing more sustainable, inclusive and a diverse economy that benefited everyone and had been

drafted to complement the ambitions articulated in our other key strategies including the One Stockport Borough Plan, Economic Plan and Schools Strategy.

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:-

- The Plan was not yet in its final form, and was intended to start the process of consultation with a view to the finalised document being resubmitted to the scrutiny committee in June.
- It was noted that there was a disparity in the figures within the report where data was being obtained from a number of sources including population data derived from the census and that around the number of Stockport jobs and employers. This was made complex by the movement of people between boroughs for work purposes.
- The Plan was written from the position that Stockport wanted all children to do better in school and not that we would accept that some children will not succeed.
- Free career advice was provided to all vulnerable young people and a buyback service was offered to local schools for a universal information and advice service.
- There was a demand for post-16 places that may not be being met within Stockport with significant numbers of young people travelling out of borough. This had implications, particularly for the most vulnerable, who would be least likely to be able to access education and training provided out of borough.
- More work needed to be done to understand whether the 32% of Stockport students who access post-16 places outside of Stockport were making a positive choice to do so, or whether this was driven by insufficiency of appropriate places in Stockport.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

5. SCHOOL INVESTMENT PLAN

The Director of Education, Work & Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) detailing how the Council would carry out its responsibility, in line with the commitments made in the Borough Plan and School Strategy to ensure there were sufficient places in good and improving local inclusive schools at the heart of the community that children and families wanted to go to.

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:-

- There was a significant shortfall in funding which limited the Council's ability to address the challenges within the school estate.
- It was known that children thrived within good environments, and the report clearly demonstrates the ability of schools to organise flexibly diminished as problems arose with the condition of buildings.
- There was a need to maintain sufficient available capacity within the school place system to provide the necessary flexibility so that the system could operate effectively.

- Increasing costs of labour and materials was reducing the scope of what could be achieved with the available finance.
- The 150 additional school places previously planned to be introduced at Bramhall High School had now been secured elsewhere following the discovery of reinforced, aerated, autoclaved concrete at the school.
- It was noted that demand for places in the primary sector had now levelled off and work needed to be done to ensure that schools remained viable.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. SEND UPDATE - SEMH, ALTERNATIVE PROVISIONS AND EHCP

The Director of Education, Work & Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the current position and context of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Stockport. The report also provided an update in relation to Education Health and Care (EHC) Plan Timeliness, pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, Alternative Provision (AP) and the SEND Inspection Framework.

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:-

- The proposal to provide additional Educational Psychologists was welcomed.
- More needed to be done to support those children and families who were waiting for a formal autism diagnosis to ensure that they were 'waiting well'.
- Many parents had expressed frustration with the time taken to get an assessment, and it was noted that the longer it took to obtain an assessment, those with more complex needs became increasingly expensive to support once that had been completed.
- The level of communication with parents and carers, signposting them to other services while awaiting an autism diagnosis was welcomed.
- It was noted that the cost of external independent provision was significant, and in some cases was not always providing the desired outcomes.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That it be noted that the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education would be writing to the Department for Education expressing concern in relation to the sufficiency of training places for educational psychologists.

7. REINFORCED AUTOCLAVED AERATED CONCRETE (RAAC) AND SCHOOL BUILDINGS

The Director of Education, Work & Skills submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the guidance issued to Local Authorities and responsible bodies relating to the potential risks surrounding the use of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) within construction of school buildings. It also provided an update on the impact on the two affected schools in the borough: St Thomas

Church of England Primary School, Marriot Street and Bramhall High School, including updates on actions taken and costs incurred to date.

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:-

- Officers from the Council's Estates and Asset Management team had worked tirelessly to support St Thomas Church of England Primary School and Bramhall High School since RAAC was discovered in those buildings.
- The Department for Education had worked closely with the schools and the Council to bring about a resolution to the issues, and the inclusion of both schools in the School Rebuilding Programme was particularly welcomed.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That the thanks of the Scrutiny Committee be extended to the Estates and Asset Management team and the Director of Education, Work & Skills for their work in supporting St Thomas Church of England Primary School and Bramhall High School to ensure that the education of young people at those schools was able to continue with as little disruption as possible.

8. SCRUTINY REVIEW FINAL REPORT – SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Committee and Lead Councillor for the Review (Councillor Janet Mobbs) submitted the draft final report of the Scrutiny Committee's Review of Services for Young People (copies of which had been circulated) that contained the findings and recommendations from the Review. The Scrutiny Committee was invited to make amendments to the report prior to its submission to the Cabinet on 12 March 2024.

RESOLVED - (1) That the draft Services for Young People Final Report be approved and adopted

(2) That the thanks of the Scrutiny Committee be extended to all those who took part in the Scrutiny Review.

9. AGENDA PLANNING

A representative of the Assistant Director for 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.

It was suggested that the Scrutiny Committee would benefit from receiving a report on the impact of antisemitism and islamophobia in local schools.

RESOLVED – (1) That the report be noted.

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(2) That the Director of Education, Work and Skills be requested to submit a report to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in relation to the impact of antisemitism and islamophobia in local schools.

The meeting closed at 7.49 pm