

## **CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 8 February 2017 at 6.00pm in Meeting Room G3/4, Addenbrook House, Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3 4NT 7**

**Present:** Councillors S Barnes, K Guy (Chair), J Jones, N Lowery, J Pinter, S Reynolds and K Sahota and co-optees S Fikeis and C Healy.

**Also Present:** Cllr Gilly Reynolds, Cabinet Member for Education, Employment & Regeneration (CYPSC-28/29); J Collins, Assistant Director Education and Corporate Parenting (CYPSC-28); A Cooke, SEND and Inclusion Service Delivery Manager (CYPSC-29); S Jones, Scrutiny Officer; M Parker, QA Specialist (CYPSC-28); Simon Wellman, Group Manager SEND EPS (CYPSC-29); S Worthington, Democratic & Scrutiny Services Officer.

The Chair welcomed Cllr Reynolds to the meeting following her appointment to the committee by Council on 19 January. The Chair informed members of the resignation of Mr S Rayner as the Anglican diocesan representative and put on record his thanks to Mr Rayner for his contribution to the work of the committee over the last few years. A replacement was being sought from the diocese.

#### **CYPSC-26 Apologies for Absence**

Cllrs J Frances and K Tomlinson and co-optees L Fowler, C Morgan, S Osman and M Ward

#### **CYPSC-27 Declarations of Interest**

None

#### **CYPSC-28 Educational attainment and school improvement**

The Chair introduced the item saying the purpose was to consider reports on school performance further to the meeting in November. The committee had also requested data on children in care which had not yet been published. He invited the Cabinet member and officers to make opening remarks and introduce the report.

The Cabinet member said that the report showed that schools in the borough were moving in the right direction but there was still a lot to do. The expectation was for all children and young people in the borough to achieve and for schools not just to reach the national average but to do better.

The AD introduced the report which showed performance at primary and secondary level against national averages. Since the last meeting, the KS2 progress measures had been published to give certainty about schools below floor standard and the KS4 results had been validated. It had been hoped to present the children in care attainment but the national data had not yet been published.

The AD highlighted the following points on **primary school performance**:

- The Department for Education (DfE) had set the benchmark for the headline measure at KS2 (children meeting the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths combined) had been set at 65% but the published results had fallen short of the target which was put down to the introduction of the new curriculum and assessment framework. The national average was 53%. The average for Telford and Wrekin was 56%, 3% above national average.
- Any school below national average could potentially fall below floor standard but once the progress measures had been applied only one primary school in the borough had fallen below floor which was the least ever. Only one primary was deemed 'coasting' i.e. below national expectation for three years and showing insufficient progress. Aqueduct Primary was below floor and the new Head Teacher was working with the QA Specialist and had brought in support from the Severn Teaching School Alliance. Additional funding from the Education Funding Agency had been brokered to buy in extra support.
- Overall the results were good and there was satisfaction that primary schools were doing a good job but there were still expectations to achieve more than 3% above national average.

The following additional information was provided in response to observations and questions:

- Explaining how the headline measure was calculated, the score was based on the % achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics and the average scaled score in reading and mathematics. Schools with a lower headline score than Aqueduct had stayed above floor standard because of the progress measures.
- Responding to a question about whether the 0% score for Haughton School and The Bridge should be cause for concern, the AD replied that they were special schools for children with complex needs. Haughton was for children with complex needs and moderate learning difficulties and the Bridge was for children with profound learning difficulties and they did not work to the same thresholds as mainstream schools.
- A Member was concerned about how information was put into the public domain as the number of 'red' rated scores could create the impression that a lot of schools were below the national average and there was a need to negate any misperceptions. The AD replied this had been done successfully. Telford and Wrekin was the 3rd best performing authority in the West Midlands and there was recognition that the government had raised the bar so a lot of children who would have met the expected standard in previous years had not met it this year.
- In terms of attainment of children from ethnic minority backgrounds and the impact on school performance, there were no national figures but data was analysed locally against a number of criteria such as gender, disadvantage, children with English as a second language etc. to identify learners who may need support. The QA Specialist said she would expect schools to have a plan for these groups with peer measurement targets and for the plan to be monitored

for progress. In terms of children with English as a second language, they were not a homogenous group. Some were bi-lingual learners and their results could be better than their peers. With regard to children from Eastern European backgrounds, parents may be working in blue collar jobs with varying degrees of English literacy but they had aspirations for their children and supported their education. Schools did not always have an adult with the same home background as the child but could be supported in other ways – as an example one school partnered children up e.g. a child with good maths and poor English with a child with poor maths and good English to help each other and develop positive relationships. The literacy of parents could make a big difference but bi-lingual skills could be an advantage. There was no evidence of children with English as a second language holding other children back. A Member commented from her experience in a FE college that it was important to get the message out that young people from ethnic minority backgrounds have a strong desire to learn and do not hold other children back.

- In terms of the actions to address the issues at Aqueduct Primary a Member asked how the initial meetings had gone and how regular the meetings were. The QA Specialist replied they were working in partnership with the school and the Severn Teaching School Alliance which had stressed the need for pupils to show their understanding of maths. There were a mix of actions being taken such as learning walks and book looks and the QA Specialist would be asking questions and challenging the impact.
- In response to a question about whether the data analysis included the impact of the Pupil Premium, the AD replied that Pupil Premium funding was targeted differently in each school. Schools and governing bodies had autonomy to decide how the money would be best spent. The QA Specialist had previous experience as an Ofsted inspector and part of her role was to look at this. Schools had a duty to publish reports on how the Pupil Premium was being spent and the impact and the QA Specialist would use the information to try to ensure the money was targeted at the biggest challenges. The QA Specialist said they could look at the weakest performing pupils to extrapolate what was happening but they also looked at the highest performing pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. The primary schools were keen to demonstrate what they were doing and plenty of information was shared but it was more difficult with secondary schools. The primaries had a more open culture of sharing information and working with the local authority. The Cabinet Member added that there were good relationships with the primary schools. She visited schools regularly to find out what was happening and to find out what the schools needed from the authority which was central to what they were trying to achieve.
- A member asked how many primary schools were academies and the AD confirmed there were currently four; Lawley Village Primary which was not shown in the report because there was no Year 6 data yet, Dawley Primary, Grange Park Primary and Priorslee Primary which had been the first to convert. In terms of other potential converters, there were none to the AD's knowledge. Legislation requiring schools to convert had been withdrawn last summer but some schools had already started conversations with the governing bodies and there may be a

handful of schools still considering converting. The majority appeared to think that things were good as they were and there was no reason to change.

- Given that academies were not accountable to the local authority, the Chair wanted to know how the Council was developing the relationship with the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) who was responsible for performance of academies. Members were informed that Christine Quinn, appointed RSC for the West Midlands, had come into post on 4 October 2016 and had attended the schools conference on 11 October. The AD had started dialogue with her and as part of his wider role of supporting the Educational Achievement Network would be meeting the RSC and regional Ofsted inspector at half-term to plan work. However the AD's view was that the authority had a duty to all children and young people in the borough including those in academies and part of his role was to maintain relationships with academy sponsors and to engage with academy trusts. This had been done and there was dialogue with all academy sponsors running schools in the borough. The objective was to have good quality teaching and learning regardless of who managed the school. As to whether the RSC would attend a meeting of the committee, the AD assured members that she was taking an interest not just in academies but also in other schools that were below floor standard or coasting and she had written to Aqueduct and would monitor progress. She had indicated that she wanted to engage. There was no reason why the committee could not invite her to a meeting but there would be pressure on her diary.

The AD highlighted the following points on **secondary school performance**:

- Change to the KS4 measures had been discussed at the last meeting. The headline measures were 'Progress 8', which measured how well pupils have progressed in their best 8 subjects between KS2 and GCSE, and 'Attainment 8' which measured attainment in English and Maths (A\*-C) and A\*-C grades in six other subjects. For Progress 8, a score between 0.0 and 0.5 would be deemed good and 0.5+ would be deemed very good; a score between 0 and -0.5 would be deemed not so good and below -0.5 would be of concern. HLC had achieved a score of 0.62 above all other schools in the borough which was a remarkable achievement. The QA Specialist noted that HLC had been ranked in the 3<sup>rd</sup> percentile nationally for Progress 8 while being ranked in the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile for disadvantage.
- The QA Specialist was working closely with Charlton School and there had been significant progress since the school was put into special measures.
- The academy sponsor (Haberdashers) had been disappointed by the dip in performance at Abraham Darby but were ready to put in measures for improvement and the relationship with Haberdashers was good.
- The Communities Academy Trust had taken over the former TCMAT schools and all three schools were now making good progress. Ofsted had visited last term:
  - Telford Langley had been taken out of Special Measures
  - Telford Park had made significant progress particularly around reading and it was hoped would come out of Special Measures next term
  - Telford Priory was newly formed so there was no previous Ofsted judgement but the AD and QA Specialist had visited to put learning measures in place.Overall it was felt the three schools were moving in the right direction.

The following additional information was provided in response to questions:

- There was a question about whether there was a mechanism for schools to share best practice especially learning from HLC. The QA Specialist said schools with good progress with disadvantaged students had got together informally to look at how practice could be shared. HLC was working with Ercall Wood Technology College and Charlton School. There had been recognition that the schools should also be involving the primary clusters to share practice and learn.
- The AD clarified that Thomas Telford School was a City Technology College sponsored by the Mercers Company and Tarmac Holdings. Thomas Telford was also the main sponsor of Madeley Academy and had the same Board. Practice was shared between staff but the intake at Madeley Academy was different from Thomas Telford in terms of prior attainment.
- A Member asked about the level of engagement with Abraham Darby and how the challenges were being recognised. The QA Specialist had done a learning walk with Years 7 and 8 and another was planned for next week. The school was taking a focus on reading and writing and taking better account of children coming up from primary level. There had been some issues with maths and one of the barriers to improvement had been difficulties in recruiting maths teachers. The AD added that Abraham Darby also engaged with network meetings and were members of the Secondary Heads and Principals network.
- A Member asked whether the success at HLC could be attributed to the model with the primary and secondary located on one site and whether the model was being considered elsewhere. The AD replied there was some evidence to support through learning and the model was being considered at Grange Park Primary and Telford Park School. There was not enough evidence yet but there could be a smoother transition for children moving from primary to secondary where they are familiar with the school. Conversely, there could be children who want to have a fresh start at a secondary school so there could be pros and cons. The intake at HLC was from HLC Primary, Millbrook Primary and other schools and there was a high demand for places.
- A member asked whether it was possible to compare performance with schools outside the borough with a similar demography to track progress against similar schools. The AD replied that staff were working on a regional overview. There were advantages to comparing with statistical neighbours but they still needed to benchmark against national averages and aim for national standards or better. The member said comparing with statistical neighbours would give a measure of the level of progress with similar schools. The Cabinet Member said that she and the AD had met with other heads in the West Midlands and this was taking place.
- A Member asked whether it was fair to compare secondary schools in deprived areas with those in affluent areas and if there were different expectations for schools depending on the catchment area. The AD replied that some schools operated in a more challenging environment than others but they did not tolerate lower expectations of a child because of their background. HLC was a good example to counter misconceptions about children from disadvantaged

backgrounds – the school had turned around to be one of the best not just in the borough but in the country and this had been achieved by the belief in and expectation of every child and transmitting this message to parents. A member agreed that HLC were good at engaging parents.

- A Member questioned the performance of the three schools run by the Communities Academy Trust. Around 45% of young people in the borough attend one of the schools and fewer than 50% had achieved the average attainment of A\*-C in Maths and English which was not equipping them for the workforce. The AD said he would dispute that academic qualifications alone made young people work ready. There had been an exercise to engage employers and parents and none had said they would just look for A\*-C grades. Historically not all children had achieved 5 A\*-C grades but they had got into the workforce and employers were interested in other skills such as IT, flexibility, teamwork etc. The schools were at the bottom of the table and there had been issues with staff leaving but the AD was confident that the new management teams understood the job to be done and were making progress.

When there were no further questions, the Chair put to members that the Committee should send a letter to the staff and pupils at HLC congratulating them on their achievement and this was agreed.

The Chair noted the news that the AD would be leaving the organisation at the end of the summer term and put on record his thanks to the AD for serving the Council well and that he would be missed.

The AD and QA Specialist left the meeting.

## **CYPSC-29    SEND reforms**

The Chair introduced the item which was to receive further reports requested in November. Reports had been provided on SEND performance and costs. He invited the Cabinet Member and officers to introduce themselves and make opening remarks on the reports to highlight key points. It was noted the Group Manager for SEND EPS had only taken up post in October.

### **SEND performance**

The Cabinet Member said the service was in a much stronger position now than last November. The headline was that 55% of statements had been transferred to EHC plans, which was huge progress. There was still a lot of work to do but things were on the right track and she was confident that all the transfers would be complete by the deadline.

The Group Manager highlighted the following points:

- Regarding the transfer of statements to EHC plans, the DfE requested monthly progress updates from all local authorities. It was a challenge nationally but Telford & Wrekin was doing well.
- A lot of authorities had struggled to reduce the EHC assessment process from 26 to 20 weeks. The SEND reforms required authorities to work more closely with

families but in less time. Last year performance had been poor in terms of meeting the deadline but significant work had been done since October to understand the process, track data, set the expectations of the team and to work more closely with the professionals involved.

- Performance on meeting deadlines at key stages of the assessment process was monitored. Charts showing the number of overdue deadlines as of 7 November 2016 and 30 January 2017 showed the significant improvement.
- A tracking dashboard had been developed to monitor the number of requests for advice from education and health professionals and where statutory deadlines were not being met. Dashboards for November 2016 and January 2017 were shown in the report.
- The report flagged up the financial impact of clearing the backlog on the Dedicated Schools Grant as top up for mainstream schools and to fund additional placements in special schools. There was insufficient special school provision and work was being done with schools to look at increasing capacity.

The following additional information was provided in response to questions:

- In terms of the implications of not meeting statutory duties, the Group Manager said it was likely the authorities not meeting the deadline would be subject to monitoring visits by DfE. DfE had recognised that it would take time to embed the reforms but there was an expectation on authorities to meet the deadline.
- A Member asked why there were 34 out of borough placements. The Group Manager explained they were children with the most complex needs and often they had been through the authority's own schools first but needed more specialist provision. There were more children in the special schools in the borough than placed out of borough.
- A Member noted that in November the committee had been concerned about whether the Council would meet the deadline for the transfer of statements to EHC plans. She was encouraged by the progress but asked for an assurance of confidence that the deadline would be met. The Group Manager replied that he was confident the deadline would be met.
- A member asked what was being done about the shortage of special school places. The Group Manager replied that a review of special needs provision was being carried out funded by a grant from the DfE. Nationally and locally demand for provision had increased and there was a need to make mainstream provision more inclusive. The review would help with forecasting demand and identifying gaps in provision – e.g. social workers, mental health workers etc. – to quantify what was needed.
- A member remarked that the data in the report was all quantitative and wanted to know if quality had been compromised in the pursuit of targets and if there were any in-house quality measures. The Group Manager replied there was survey currently out with parents. Part of the 20 week process included collecting feedback from families and quality assurance was part of the process. The SDM assured members that the aim was not just to meet deadlines but to improve the quality of the service.

- A member asked about the challenges of the 20 week deadline in terms of needing to talk to a range of partners within the time. The Group Manager said there was a statutory duty for partners to respond within 6 weeks. Professional advice was a key part of the assessment process and was challenging - capacity had been identified as a key risk. The assessment process was complex. A new system had been introduced in Telford where plans were co-produced with parents and a meeting is held in the school to review the plan with partners.
- A Member asked about educational attainment at the special schools. The SDM explained that the Bridge and Haughton catered for young people with cognitive learning difficulties and complex needs. Some of the pupils make good progress but they do not operate to the same educational thresholds as mainstream schools.
- A member asked if there was regular senior manager oversight of workloads. The Group Manager assured members that there was good oversight. He had started weekly meetings and case conferences to understand the workload and was now moving on to look at quality and outcomes and how to work better with parents. Services had been fragmented and a lot of work had been done to bring services back into one service area under the Group Manager and SDM so there was holistic support for schools. The SDM said the team had been empowered – the professional nature of their roles had been recognised and this had helped to accelerate the assessment process.

### **SEND cost of provision**

The SDM highlighted the following points in the report:

- Telford had a higher % than the national average of pupils with EHC plans or in a special school (3.3%:2.9%)
- Weekly expenditure per student was lower in Telford (£60) than nationally (£92). Even assuming Telford had the national average number of students with an EHC Plan the equivalent weekly cost per student would be £68, significantly lower than the national average.
- A number of factors accounted for the lower cost including the higher number of students in special schools which enabled them to achieve better value. Work had been done with the special schools on staffing structures so they were appropriately funded for the class size and made the best use of resources.
- The 34 children placed out of borough had a range of different needs. Some were children in care where education was provided on-site as part of a residential placement. Others with 'low incident needs' attend a local school.
- Parental preference had to be taken into account. The authority always recommended the school to best meet the needs of the child but under the SEND reforms parental choice was paramount and parents could request other provision. If the authority disagreed the parents could take the decision to a tribunal.

The following additional information was provided in response to questions:

- A member asked about the number and cost of tribunals. The Group Manager did not have figures to hand but said the rate of tribunals in Telford was high.



There were a lot of requests for places in the special schools when they were full, which was a challenge. Most tribunals ruled in favour of parents but there had been a recent ruling in favour of the authority when Queensway had been deemed a better and more efficient use of resources. The key thing for the authority was to understand the reasons why a case had been taken to tribunal and to strengthen the arguments. Moving forward, it was about ensuring there was enough local provision to meet demand from complex needs that parents would choose. The SDM gave an example of where they had worked with parents to develop a package to enable the child to be brought back into the borough.

- A Member asked if conversations with parents were happening early enough so parents could be confident in the authority's recommendations. The Group Manager replied that the key message was to build up the mainstream schools' resilience to cope with more complex cases. The complexity of need was increasing, the funding was decreasing so they had to work differently and build up mainstream provision. The Cabinet Member said that maintained schools could be a better option – if the schools and teachers could be supported to build their confidence, parents would be more confident in mainstream education and that a special school may not be the best option.

When there were no further questions the Chair thanked the Cabinet member and officers and they left the meeting.

### **CYPSC-30    Work programme**

A copy of the work programme was tabled for discussion. There was only one more meeting scheduled this municipal year and the Chair did not want to add another meeting.

The Chair asked which items members would like to come to the final meeting on 4 April. The key items to follow up were the CSE review and the Ofsted Improvement Plan. Cllrs Sahota and Reynolds suggested the committee should also look at youth unemployment and apprenticeships. The request for the education results of children in care was noted.

It would not be possible to fit everything into one meeting and it was agreed that the Chair would meet officers to plan items for the next meeting and report back to the committee.

The meeting ended at 7.50pm

**Chairman:** .....

**Date:** .....