

**Minutes of the Children's Services and Education
Scrutiny Board**

25th July, 2017 at 5.00 pm
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor Underhill (Chair);
Councillors Ashman, Hickey, Phillips, Preece, Rouf,
Shaeen and White.
Co-opted Members Reverend French and Mrs T
Majid.

Apology: Councillors Allen, Y Davies and Horton.

In Attendance: Jim Leivers, Interim Executive Director – Children's;
Sue Moore, Group Head, Education Support
Services.

14/17 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 24th April,
2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

15/17 **Directors' Presentation of Key Issues and Priorities 2017/18**

The Group Head, Education Support Services and the Interim
Executive Director – Children's provided a presentation to the Board
relating to the following areas of work in their Directorates:

Children's Services:

- Children's Trust;
- Regional Adoption Agency;
- Ofsted Inspections and monitoring visits;

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- Sustaining Statutory Services – Education;
- School Place Planning;
- Delivery of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms;
- Quality of local schools and childcare.

The presentation outlined the current issues for the services, the priorities and risks, the focus over the next six months and in longer term.

The Group Head, Education Support Services highlighted that sustaining statutory services, and some necessary non-statutory, would be a significant challenge with an 80% reduction of Education Services Grant. She highlighted the need to increase year 7 class places by 480 by 2019 and advised that the quality of local schools and childcare may be adversely impacted by the reduction of Educational Service Grant. She explained that currently the standard of schools was deemed to be good or satisfactory, with 70% of secondary schools being good or outstanding.

It was reported that the educational reforms outlined in the Education White Paper prior to the General Election in June 2017 had subsequently been dropped and that the focus for the next six months was as follows:

- Delivery of 30-hour child care provision starting September – Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) figures suggest up to 1800 children will be eligible;
- Ensuring re-inspection of Local Area SEND work is successful – expected in January 2018;
- Development of projects, new schools and expansions to deliver pupil places, particularly in the secondary sector;
- Outcomes from school tests and examinations to define our support to schools in the future.

The Group Head summarised the longer-term focus for the Education Services as follows:

- Delivery of enough secondary school places to meet the needs by 2019;

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- Increase in the quality of secondary schools to above national and regional averages;
- Ensure all statutory processes for SEND are met and partners are fully engaged;
- Reduce the number of young people not in employment or education (NEET) and increase the availability and uptake of apprenticeships.

It was reported that Cabinet approval had been given on capital funding to support expansions of schools to deliver additional places and invest in SEND that this would continue to be pursued in a report to Cabinet in September 2017 to invest in new capital resources to invest in SEND.

In response to questions the Group Head advised that planning permission was being pursued for Wood Green School and that Education Support Services was consulting with academy schools and reviewing how services were packaged to encourage a greater uptake of services provided by the Local Authority.

The Chair thanked the Group Head for the information provided.

The Interim Executive Director – Children's Services explained that the Service was currently overseen by the Children's Commissioner due to the Secretary of State deeming the Authority to be inadequate in September 2016 and that the Authority was moving towards a Children's Trust. He advised that Malcolm Newsam had been appointed Children's Commissioner and would remain in the position for the foreseeable future.

It was reported that seven priorities had been identified as follows:

- Increase the Social Care workforce - manageable workloads;
- Management Capacity – increasing numbers of Team Managers and Group Heads;
- Safe front door and assessment;
- Doing the basics well;
- Having the right mechanisms and equipment in place;
- Effective communication;
- Making Sandwell an employer of choice.

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The Interim Executive Director outlined the focus for the service over the next six months as follows:

- Recruitment of staff;
- Permanent recruitment;
- Volume agency recruitment;
- Ofsted monitoring visit – 5th and 6th September 2017, focus on looked after children and permanence planning;
- Auditing and permanence planning;
- Budget pressures – staff and placements.

In response to questions the Interim Executive Director advised that there had been unexpected increases in the number of looked after children and the number of agency workers employed which had exceeded the amount budgeted, however the priorities outlined indicate what the Authority needs to do to improve services.

In response to a comment made relating to the continuity of social care for children, the Interim Executive Director advised that the issue of retaining Social Workers was key to continuity and that the priorities recognised this issue.

The Interim Executive Director acknowledged that the Scrutiny Board had carried out a recent scrutiny investigation in relation to recruitment and retention of Social Workers, including incentives to retain staff, and agreed to bring a report to a meeting of this Board on 14th September 2017. He advised that it was very useful to consider other ideas and practice in other organisations such as flexible working hours and career breaks.

The Chair of the Board questioned increases to the budget in relation to the increase of social care workforce and was advised that additional resources of £1.4 million to the budget would be required to address the initial shortfall, but as numbers of children in care increase the budget to manage the demand for additional resources would have to be considered. The Interim Executive Director advised that other areas of the Children's Services budget that may have been underspent would be adjusted to manage the overspend.

The Board questioned the timing of the Ofsted inspection when the Trust would not be formalised until the New Year, the Interim

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Executive Director advised that he was confident the Service was improving but that there had been delays to the implementation of the Trust due to elections.

The Board was advised of the longer-term focus which included the following:

- Children's Trust Chief Executive to be appointed and a move to the Trust by December 2017;
- Regional Adoption Agency to progress on track for July 2018;
- Maintain practice improvement activity in readiness for full Ofsted inspection within the next six months.

In response to questions about the Children's Trust the Interim Executive Director advised that there had been issues with appointing to the executive posts of the Children's Trust, however Jacqui Smith had been in post since 1st July 2017 and the post of Chief Executive had been re-advertised and would be appointed in mid-September 2017.

It was reported that the location of the Children's Trust would be at the Wellman Centre and Metsec buildings and that refurbishment work was being tendered and grant allocation been confirmed. The Board was advised that a Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 as amended 2014 (TUPE) to transfer Council Social Workers to the Children's Trust would be taking place.

In relation to developing the Regional Adoption Agency the Board was advised that the Black Country Local Authorities had signed up to a pilot scheme with Telford and Wrekin and Shropshire Councils however they had since withdrawn from the scheme, leaving Dudley, Walsall, Sandwell and Wolverhampton Councils to progress the Regional Adoption Agency. The Interim Executive Director advised that there were technical complications relating to payment of VAT which were being negotiated and it was expected that the Agency would be on track for July 2018.

The Interim Executive Director re-iterated to the Board that there were considerable challenges ahead for Children's Services such as birth bulges and school place planning, and the rising number of looked after children and the recruitment and retention of Social Workers.

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Members referred to scrutiny work carried out in 2016-17 relating to recruitment and retention of Social Workers. Members highlighted the need to grow our own Social Workers, working closely with the university and to use students from universities in social care placements.

The Interim Executive Director confirmed that newly qualified workers were attracted to the Council in the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) which is a twelve month, employer- led programme of support and assessment against the Knowledge and Skills Statement for Social Workers. He advised that there were moves for Human Resources to look at further incentives to retain newly qualified Social Workers for a three-year period following qualification.

The Interim Executive Director indicated that the problem for Children's social care services at this time was the existing Social Workers' capacity to spend time with the students due to heavy caseloads. He further indicated that it could take up to five years to train a Social Worker and there was a gap in supply, which made recruitment and incentive schemes important to take forward.

In response to a question relating to democratic control of the Children's Trust Board, the Interim Executive Director advised that the Board would be Independently chaired however the Scrutiny Board would have a role to hold the Trust to account and challenge performance.

The Chair thanked the Interim Executive Director for his presentation.

16/17 Work Programme 2017/18

The Board was asked to consider its work programme for 2017/18 and the establishment of any working groups as a vehicle to deliver the work programme.

Following a review of the Council's governance structure, at its meeting on 16th May, 2017 the Council had established four scrutiny boards and a scrutiny management board, The Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board, to deliver Sandwell's scrutiny function. The Council had also appointed two vice-chairs to each scrutiny board, who would take the lead on a topic from within their respective Board's terms of reference, reporting back to the Board on the findings of that work.

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As well as reflecting the Council's 2030 Vision, work programmes were to reflect local needs and priorities. Suggestions had therefore been sought from the public and partners via the Council's social media platforms and newsletters and the Board noted the suggestions received in respect of its terms of reference.

The Board considered the list of potential issues and topics for scrutiny in 2017/18 which were raised through consultation, brought forward from 2016/17 Scrutiny Boards or raised by members present at the meeting. During consideration of the items the Board referred to the terms of reference of the Board, the topic filter tool, the Council's visions and ambitions and the presentation of priorities and risks for the service areas as highlighted by officers.

Resolved that, subject to the approval of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board:-

- (1) a working group be established comprising Councillors White (Vice-Chair), Allen, Horton, Rouf and Co-opted Members Reverend French and Mrs Majid to undertake scrutiny of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND);
- (2) a working group be established comprising Councillors Phillips (Vice-Chair) Ashman, Hickey, Preece and Saeed to undertake scrutiny of care-leavers.
- (3) the following items be placed on the Board's work programme for 2017/2018:-
 - a) School Place Planning;
 - b) Failing Academies;
 - c) Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) update on partnership work;
 - d) Readiness for School;
 - e) Childhood Obesity update;
 - f) School leavers – career guidance;
 - g) Care leavers;
 - h) Oversight of the Children's Trust;
 - i) The Chief Executive of the Children's Trust – Vision and priorities (September 2017);
 - j) Retention and incentives for social workers (September 2017);

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- k) Oversight of Academies;
- l) Briefing note on numbers of adopted children and fostering update;
- m) Safeguarding Children Annual Report;
- n) Serious Case review update.

(Meeting ended 6:30 pm)

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