

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

**8 January 2018 at 5.00 pm
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Underhill (Chair);
Councillor Phillips (Vice-Chair);
Councillor White (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Allen, Ashman, Preece, Rouf and
Shaeen;
Reverend Peter French (Co-opted);
Mrs Tahira Majid (Co-opted).

Apologies: Councillors Hickey and L Horton.

01/18 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 13th November, 2018 be confirmed as a correct record subject to Councillor L Horton's apology being recorded.

02/18 **Education Performance – Against National and Regional Comparisons**

The Director – Education, Skills and Employment provided a report to summarise attainment in Sandwell and make comparisons with national attainment, neighbouring authorities and statistical neighbours and further detail relating to the invalidated reports.

The Director – Education, Skills and Employment shared the findings of the Ofsted summary as at 1st December 2017 highlighting the following:

- The Ofsted measured effectiveness of schools fluctuates on a weekly basis due to the frequency of inspections; however, there had been a significant improvement in secondary schools over the last 12 months;
- Early years foundation stage had also shown improvement

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- which was narrowing the gap with national comparators;
- Communications and language had improved three points in Sandwell but not Nationally which was where improvement was needed;
- Sandwell was ranked joint 5th from top when compared to statistical neighbours;
- Primary schools had improved five places for those achieving the expected standard or above in reading writing and maths and were doing a good job narrowing the gap with the national achievement standard;
- KS2 pupils were also showing good improvement locally (7%) but even better nationally (8%);
- The focus remains with KS4 in Sandwell, national test changes have made it difficult to reach a bench mark. Our schools need to get prepared for the new testing regime;
- The KS4 and KS5 figures include an additional school, the Health Futures UTC, for the first time and therefore comparisons with previous years are not straight forward; however, there was a gap widening between A level results in Sandwell and Nationally;
- Sandwell students continue to achieve well in vocational qualifications.

From the comments and questions by members of the Scrutiny Board the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- The changes to the exam system had pushed results down nationally but there had been a marginal narrowing of the gap for Sandwell which could be improved year on year.
- Sandwell Academy schools want to work with the Council and with each other to improve outcomes in Sandwell.
- Schools are coping with the changes to 1-9 grading. Initially there had been difficulty with the pass grade 5 or 4 and some of the grade boundaries were difficult to find where the pass level was.
- Concerns were raised that children from difficult backgrounds would struggle to deal with memory based work and would be better to work in blocks. There was recognition that teachers in a number of subjects now have to teach for the child to remember facts and that a variety of techniques should be used to assist them.
- In relation to special needs school children and their attainment the Board was advised that all special schools were rated as good or outstanding in Sandwell but that there

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were no attainment figures against these schools. The progress of children relevant to their needs was considered.

- Westminster special school was rated as outstanding and was very well resourced.
- Following school, many young people move out of the Borough for further education, however there were courses being developed by Sandwell College and Central Sixth and there was an increasing breadth of courses.
- Sandwell does not have a University, but the College offer is getting stronger.

The Chair referred to the need for scrutiny to look in more depth at schools in Sandwell and the progress following Ofsted reports, as requested by Cabinet. The Director advised that it would be useful for the Chair to consider improvement plans and progress being made at schools across the Borough.

03/18 School Place Planning

The Group Head, Education Support Services provided a report which considered the Council's actions about school place planning and provision since 2010 and how the Council intends to meet the challenges of demand for school places in the secondary sector from 2018.

The Group Head referred to the data relating to primary school admissions. She highlighted the following:

- 26% increase in Sandwell births between 3727 (2001/2) and 5058 (2012/13);
- The birth rate since 2012/13 fluctuates between 4600 and 4800;
- 37 expansions of existing schools (including 11 bulge expansions);
- 5200 new primary places have been provided (including 390 bulge places);
- Reception capacity has increased by 834 in 7 years;
- Significant increase in inward migration and retention - 33% increase in new to UK applications over 2 years; Midyear places increased by 220 over the last 4 years;
- Local Authority (LA) expansion plan policy was to prioritise schools that were rated 'good or outstanding' which were easy to expand and were in areas of projected high demand.

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The Group Head advised that there was a focus on Langley Secondary School, plans had been approved by DfE with a view to it being open by September 2019. She advised that there had been delays in relation to a new school planned in Wednesbury and that there had been a meeting with the Regional Schools Commissioner to discuss issues.

It was confirmed that the school would not open from September 2019 and that there were discussions being held with schools to consider taking a temporary bulge for one year, keeping current site and receiving additional funds.

The Board acknowledged that it would be a challenge and that the land for expansion in secondary schools was not available in Sandwell, some schools physically could not expand.

From the comments and questions by members of the Scrutiny Board the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- It was confirmed that the expansion to primary schools would be brick built buildings and not portacabins;
- It was clarified that where a school was unable to expand it may receive resources to adapt existing space;
- The Regional Schools Commissioner agrees temporary bulge year;
- Several schools had already agreed to additional places in the bulge year but there were more to find;
- Academies were also working with the LA and were looking for schools to be built in the right place to meet demand for places;
- Schools would move classes around to juggle the additional number of places and the existing facilities (wash rooms and dining areas) would be reviewed to ensure there would be no impact on existing pupils at the school.
- The additional resource would enable schools to adapt facilities or take on additional employees as required.

The Board welcomed the actions taken with regards to school place planning and provision since 2010 and the future plans for how the Council intends to meet future demand for school places in the secondary sector from 2018.

04/18 **Sandwell Children's Trust Update**

The Executive Director of Children's Services advised that it was timely for the report to be considered by scrutiny. He clarified that:

- the new offices in the Wellman Building were almost ready for staff to move into, the workforce would move on 1st February 2018;
- the Trust Board had been established and all Board positions appointed to;
- The Senior Management Team was not yet in place and positions were proving difficult to appoint; Interviews for permanent employees were taking place but there would be interim managers in post when the Trust goes live;
- The Trust would go live on 1st April 2018.

From the comments and questions by members of the Scrutiny Board the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- The Executive Director advised that Scrutiny Board would remain the scrutiny body for the Trust.
- The Youth Service would stay within the Council and that there would need to be a discussion about the future shape of services that would remain in the Council by the Chief Executive at full Council Meeting.
- The Council had done well to get to this point but this had come at a big cost in relation to budget;
- Scrutiny needs to consider how the Trust shapes itself, the budget and how the Council meets its responsibility for delivery to children.

The Executive Director of Children's Services advised the Board that the feedback from recent Ofsted inspection would be made public on 29th January 2018 and that this would trigger four monitoring visits starting in June 2018. The Council and the Trust would be part of the monitoring visits.

From the comments and questions by members of the Scrutiny Board about the transfer to the Trust the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- Other Trusts such as Sunderland and Slough had some difficulties in the period following transfer;
- The Trust would have to issue and deliver an improvement plan to ensure that young people and their carer's,

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particularly looked after children, received at least similar services and conditions as they receive now.

- The staff had been TUPED, there were no changes to conditions of services and West Midlands Pension Fund agreed that there were no changes to their pension;
- Agency workers would continue to be used during the bedding in of the Trust and agency rates would be in the remit of the Trust;
- The service improvements team in the Council had moved on and the new team in the Trust would look at future changes. There would be major organisational change including moving to teams of 6 to make changes.
- The Board felt that there was too much emphasis on the structure and not enough on the people. Good solid staff and good team work was required to make the Trust successful.

Resolved:-

- (1) to invite the Chief Executive of the Trust to a future meeting to talk about plans for improvement and the future of the Trust.

05/18

Chair and Vice-Chair Updates

The Board was advised that the Fostering Work Group was due to circulate a survey to all foster carers. The feedback would be considered at the next meeting. Responses were being chased from Housing, Council Tax and Leisure Services and should be reported to the next work group.

The Board was advised that the SEND work group had attended a visit to Sandwell Transition Education Partnership Service (STEPS), a visit to CAMHS in West Bromwich had been postponed and a visit to Connor Road and meeting was planned for January 2018.

The Chair advised that she would be following up a request of Cabinet for Scrutiny to consider Ofsted reports, look at the recommendations and talk to Academy leadership about the action plans.

(Meeting ended at 6.35 p.m.)

<p><i>Contact Officer: Deb Breedon</i> <i>Democratic Services Unit</i> <i>0121 569 3896</i></p>
