

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

**12<sup>th</sup> March, 2018 at 5.00 pm  
at the Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

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

**Apologies:** Councillors Hickey, L Horton and Preece.

**11/18      Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Underhill declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 5 on the agenda relating to childhood obesity. Any discussion about school meals may constitute an interest in relation to Councillor Underhill's role as a member of the Sandwell Inspired Partnership Services (SIPS) Board.

**12/18      Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 8th January, 2018 and 5th February, 2018 be confirmed and signed as correct records.

**13/18      Sandwell Transition Education Partnership Services (STEPS)  
Update**

The Director – Education, Skills and Employment, the Executive Head Teacher of Sandwell Transition Education Partnership Services (STEPS) and the Sandwell virtual school (LACE) and the Centre Manager for STEPS provided a presentation about the STEPS Service, an update on the current position and summary of the Members' visit to the STEPS Service in November 2017.

The Director – Education, Skills and Employment advised the

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Board that Government Migration funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government had recently been secured for the STEPS Assessment Centre and Services to run for a further two years.

The Executive Head Teacher of STEPS and LACE Virtual School advised that he had been in post for three months and felt privileged to be part of this extraordinary provision for young people and their families, who were new arrivals to Sandwell. He highlighted the following:

- Sandwell should be proud of STEPS as a provision which was currently working with 75 young people, aged 5 to 16 years, from all over the world.
- 25 children in each class Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2; the children's behaviour was exemplary and they were willing to communicate with each other in different languages and English to learn and participate in sessions during their transition to main stream schools in Sandwell.
- Some children had attended school in their country of origin and some had not. All of the children were surprised at the need to wear a uniform.
- The centre opened between 9:30 am and 12:30 pm. it was not a school but would show the children what it was like to be in a school.
- 1136 children had attended STEPS since 1<sup>st</sup> February 2017.
- STEPS currently had a waiting list of new arrivals, waiting to access the STEPS Centre provision.

The Centre Manager for STEPS advised that:

- Other organisations, such as SIPS, supported projects at the Centre and events were held to celebrate what had been achieved and learned, such as open mornings and concerts.
- The STEPS Centre also provided support in money management, family finance and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes for parents.
- The STEPS Centre continued to promote and facilitate excellent practice in English Language (EAL) teaching and learning through the Sandwell Schools' EAL Network and Professional development days.
- STEPS had been invited to provide 'an introduction to EAL and its applications to primary schools for student teachers and to be involved in Wolverhampton Local Authority's Strategic School

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Improvement bid which was focused around improving the language proficiency outcomes of students with EAL.

From the comments and questions by members of the Scrutiny Board about the STEPS Centre, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:

- The STEPS Centre looked to teach issues that would not be known by non-UK resident's due to cultural differences, including: manners, road safety, face book/ social media.
- The STEPS Centre aimed to support and prepare the whole family for living in Sandwell and going to school in Sandwell.
- The rationale for morning only opening was neither funding nor educational based; the STEPS Centre was not a school, it was an assessment centre. If the Centre held sessions all day it would have to be registered as a school and as Sandwell local authority could not set up new schools it would have had to be an Academy.
- The STEPS Centre provides support whilst the children and families await the hard to place panel to meet.
- Would like to expand the Centre but the resources required would also grow. The Hollies Centre may want to consider expanding as a designated area. It would be good for schools to contribute to secure the centre's future beyond two years.
- Travel to the Centre from outlying areas was supported by the STEPS by allocating bus passes if the child(ren) met the Local Authority's 'distance from school' criteria.
- Brexit may impact on the numbers of new people moving to the UK and coming into the Borough.
- When families came into the Borough they were staying with friends or family, or renting private accommodation in Houses In Multiple Occupancy (HMO). It was difficult to locate most families; the STEPS Centre gives a place of first contact for families and children.
- Children and families were supported whilst on the waiting list. A cancellation of one pupil placement panel had impacted on the number of people on the waiting list. Children may stay on at the Centre longer to await transfer to school.
- The number of families settling in the West Bromwich and Smethwick areas had put pressure on school places which were already full and were being asked to take on additional children. There may be a need to review the hard to place panel criteria.
- Many children starting in secondary school start with a lower level of understanding of English, but soon adapted, caught up

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and were generally keen to learn.

- The STEPS Centre is unique to the UK. A similar facility in Bolton was established as a school, and was managed quite differently to the STEPS assessment Centre.
- The success of the Centre could be a cause for concern if it acted as a magnet to friends and family resident in Sandwell and surrounding districts, or if other local authorities signposted people to Sandwell.

The Chair thanked the Director and Officers for the encouraging update about the progress being made in the STEPS Service and welcomed the news that migration funding had been secured a further two years.

### **Resolved:-**

- (1) that in appreciation of the continuing good work and success of the children and staff of the Sandwell Transition Educational Partnership Services (STEPS), the Director – Monitoring Officer make arrangement for the staff, children and their parents to meet the Mayor of Sandwell at the Big House, Oldbury.

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### **Childhood Obesity Update**

The Acting Director of Public Health and the Programme Manager Obesity, Physical Activity and Tobacco Control provided an update on the current position relating to childhood obesity in Sandwell and on the actions arising from the scrutiny of childhood obesity carried out by the Board during 2016 - 17 work programme.

The Programme Manager presented key messages relating to the current position:

- Childhood obesity may be plateauing, but there were too many obese or overweight children in Sandwell.
- 12.1% of Reception children (aged 4-5) were recorded as obese – an increase of 0.2% from 11.9% in 2015-16.
- 27.8% of Year 6 children (10-11 year olds) were recorded as obese (2016-17) which is an increase of 1.7% from 26.1% in 2015/16.

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- Both levels were higher than national average of 9.6% for Reception Year and 20.0% for year 6 children.
- The trends in Sandwell were broadly similar to those of other statistical neighbours.
- Sandwell Council's strategic actions to address obesity were closely aligned to national guidelines and follow a 'whole systems approach'.
- Public Health and key partners were working together in six key areas, seeking to:
  - Supporting local schools (on doubling pupil premium from Government sugar tax), via food projects, learning hubs;
  - Helps schools achieve 60-minute physical activity daily;
  - Support Early Years Menu, healthy Start Scheme;
  - Make healthier options available via Eat Out Eat Well, catering award for local businesses;
  - Support 5% sugar reduction in food – 20% by 2020;
  - Supporting national initiatives – restrictions on food and drink, advertising, food labelling, healthier options in public sector meals including hospitals.
- A key challenge to address in Sandwell is access to cheap, highly dense, sugar laden food of poor nutritional quality.

Updates to the following actions from the Scrutiny Board work 2016-17 were as follows:

- The Director Public Health was asked to identify primary schools not participating or engaging with the Active Schools Project and explain why they were not.
  - Engagement - the programme was shared with all schools and training given. Further targeted resource was offered for one term over a two-year period.
  - Outcomes 2017-18 – 90 primary schools had been engaged and over 80 schools had become registered users of the Healthy Active Schools System (HASS). Over 60 schools had completed the regular physical literacy testing and recording their results of HASS. 25% of those are achieving the national recommended level of physical activity.
  - Next Steps – Public Health engagement with schools would continue. The Public Health Development Officer team (x6) would replace the Community Activity Network Development Officer (CANDO) roles from 1 April 2018.

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- The Director Public Health was asked to present the results of SHAPE consultation with parents and report back on the next steps.
  - 842 school meal surveys were completed during last term and the evaluation and findings would be made available in April 2018.
  - Seven school meal providers would be meeting to consider food and nutritional improvements.
  - The findings and discussions would help shape the future of school meals and food in schools to initiate improvements in children's food and nutrition.
  
- That a progress report is presented after 12 months.
  - 7 Learning communities, schools had developed 64 cooking, growing and healthier snack food projects commencing in 2016-17.
  - Training and awareness, 36 Level 2 – Food Safety Certificates (Qualifications) had been awarded to school staff and some parents. 53 Food safety awareness sessions had been awarded, school health nurses were distributed with nutritional awareness training packs, as were supporting 'Summer Meals' work in local community centres.

From the comments and questions by members of the Scrutiny Board regarding the Childhood Obesity update the following responses were made and issues highlighted:

- The Council was automatically eligible for 'Beat the Street' this year but the programme did not provide what Sandwell wanted and proved inflexible.
- More place based meetings would be taking place with the Cabinet Members to move things forward. The work of the Public Health – Development Team must be streamlined. There would be a delivery plan and matrix, and engagement with primary schools, school nurses would continue in order to find ways to push forward from April 2018.
- School health profiles for schools had been prepared. This would support an informed approach to engagement with individual schools.
- Feedback on Make, Move and Munch would be evaluated and shared with scrutiny when it was available.

The Chair thanked the Acting Director Public Health and

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Programme Manager Obesity, Physical Activity and Tobacco Control for a very full and interesting update.

### 14/18 **Sandwell Children's Trust Update**

The Executive Director of Children's Services and the Trust Project Director provided an update on the Children's Social Care Trust.

The Trust Project Director presented an overview and update of the project. She advised that all recruitment to senior positions was complete and that transition arrangements were moving forward for a seamless operational delivery and move to the Trust on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018.

From the comments and questions by members of the Scrutiny Board about the Sandwell Children's Trust, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:

- The project had been delivered over 18 months in ten work streams. Department for Education funding had been secured to refurbish the buildings that the Trust would be housed in and all work was complete and over 300 staff had moved in.
- Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) would remain in the Council House, but a refurbishment would be carried out to ensure that all staff had the same working conditions.
- The Trust had appointed interim Directors to the Senior Management Team posts. Interviews for permanent Directors were taking place in March 2018 and further recruitment to Human Resources, Finance and strategic roles was underway.
- The Operational Partnership Board between Council and the Trust would take place monthly.
- The Trust would buy back legal, transactional and HR services from the Council for the first year under a service level agreement (SLA).
- The Trust Chair was keen to involve scrutiny and had met with the Scrutiny Board Chair and would be bringing the Annual review report to Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board in the summer each year. She would also attend the Board when requested to do so.
- The Executive Director advised that there was a role for scrutiny to ask for anything it felt needed to be looked at, including exception reporting. He advised that it may be advisable to allow the Trust some time to bed in to innovative

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- ways of working before inviting the Trust to attend scrutiny.
- There would be an inspection visit 30-31 May 2018. The Trust had been registered with Ofsted and would be setting up an independent fostering agency and an independent Adoption Agency.
- Doncaster had been appointed to the Children's Services advisor.
- The Trust Project Director was happy to go live on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018.
- Members wanted clarification on how they would have contact with the Trust's children's services social care team if they had concerns about any child in Sandwell. They were advised to contact the DCS Director – Children's Services who could link the Member to the relevant team or officer.
- The Chair was keen to confirm there would be no data-protection barriers for information between the Trust and the Council.

The Executive Director – Children's Services advised that the Director of Children's Services post had been advertised and the closing date was 19<sup>th</sup> March 2018 with an aim to appoint by mid-April. The Chief Executive would act as DCS until the permanent appointment came into post.

From the comments and questions by members of the Scrutiny Board in relation to services that would remain in the remit of the DCS, the following responses were made and issues highlighted: -

- The following were amongst services that would remain as a universal provision - Children's Centres, Youth Services.
- The Director of Children's Services advised that clearly defined services for vulnerable young people had been set down in the Children's Trust agreement. The new Director of Children's services would have to consider what the rest of children's operational delivery would look like in Sandwell.
- The Gifted and Talented programme was highlighted for further scrutiny along with Children's Centres and the Youth Service.

The Chair thanked the Executive Director and the Trust Project Director for the update to scrutiny.



15/18      **Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Scrutiny Work Group Report**

The Executive – Director - Children's and Chair welcomed the report and recommendations of the Work Group.

Notional SEN budget was an additional amount of money to help special educational provision meet the needs of children with SEND. It was called notional because schools can spend it in the way that they think is best. It goes directly to schools in their funding, rather than being ring fenced to the needs of specific children.

The Chair suggested that the ring fencing of Special Educational Needs (SEN) Notional Budget funding should be highlighted to the Cabinet Member and that representations should be made to the Department for Education on this issue.

**Resolved:-**

- (1) That the Board and the Director – Children's Services welcomed the report of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Scrutiny Work Group.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services be requested to promote the importance of tier 1 and tier 2 SEND services in Sandwell, to recognise the value of supporting mental wellbeing in children and young people at an early stage to prevent progression to specialist tier 3 provision for mental health services.
- (3) That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services be requested to make representation to DfE to ring fence SEN Notional Budget to provide support for the benefit and well-being of children with Special Educational Needs.
- (4) That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services be requested to encourage schools which receive SEN Notional Budget funding to prioritise that funding for the benefit and wellbeing of children and young people with special educational needs.

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**10/18 Chair and Vice-Chair Update Fostering Work Group**

The Board was advised that the Fostering Work Group had met on two occasions to gather and consider evidence. Members of the Board voiced concern that there was not another meeting this municipal year but it was agreed that the draft report should be forwarded to the Director - Children's Services and Cabinet Member for Children's Services to consider the initial findings of the Work Group. The Board felt that the feedback would give a useful insight into the foster carers' perceptions and possible incentives for foster carers moving forward.

(Meeting ended at 6.55 p.m.)

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