

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

**24th June, 2019 at 5.00 pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Singh (Chair);
Councillor Preece (Vice-Chair);

Councillors Allen, Ashman, Chidley, Z Hussain,
McVittie and Phillips.

Apologies: Councillor Carmichael, Costigan and Webb;
C Ward-Lewis and T Majid (Co-opted members).

In attendance: Lesley Hagger, Executive Director of Children's
Services, Sandwell Council;
Chris Ward, Director of Education, Skills and
Employment.

9/19 **Declaration of Interest**

Councillor Allen declared a personal interest at the meeting in relation to item 4 work programming and minute 8/19 relating to Play and Youth Services, his son was an employee of Sandwell Council Youth Services.

10/19 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 March, 2019 be approved as a correct record.

11/19 **Work Programming 2019-20**

The Board received a presentation from the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Director - Education, Skills and Employment.

The presentation highlighted the following: -

- the statutory roles for all children and for vulnerable children;
- external scrutiny;

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board – 24 June, 2019

- Children's Services Business Plan priorities;
- key themes for Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board;
- the national focus.

The Executive Director highlighted that some services were for all children, including: -

- early learning and childcare;
- the duty to ensure that there were enough school places;
- that post 16 young people remain in education;
- that children and young people have a voice and participate in public decision making.

The Executive Director advised that the health and wellbeing of young people was part of the Public Health function.

The Board noted the following points in relation to the Children's and Education Services: -

- some services were for some children - the statutory role for vulnerable children, excluding adoptions, was carried out by the Sandwell Children's Trust;
- legislation changed in 2016 to require Regional Adoption Agency arrangements to be introduced. New arrangements changed the way that adoptions operated in Local Authorities and the 'Adoption at Heart' service was recently established in this area. The service worked closely with the Children's Trust and the Council in a three-way relationship:
 - children in care;
 - adoption activity;
 - adoption support.
- Sandwell Children's Trust worked closely with Adoption at Heart. Both service providers could be invited to update the Board, as part of its work programme;
- alternative education and services for disability needs was provided. The Board welcomed that the Special Educational Needs (SEND) service had made considerable improvement and had been recognised nationally as best practice;
- youth justice and corporate parenting services were delivered, and the Council provided early help and family support services through Children's Centre's to support the most vulnerable.

The Board was advised that external scrutiny of Children's Services and Education was carried out by regulatory bodies, such as Ofsted,

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board – 24 June, 2019

through peer reviews and national benchmarking. The Children's Service was the most inspected service in this Local Authority, there had been 35 Ofsted school inspections last year plus monitoring visits. Some schools had inspection visits every 12-15 week and Local Authority administrative was under pressure to support all these Ofsted visits, other service inspections and reviews.

The Board received the Children's Services Business Plan 2019-22 and noted the highlights from each priority as follows:

Priority 1: 'We want young people to be the best they can be, working with children.' All services aimed to deliver this priority.

Priority 2: 'We want young people to be healthy and active'. The Board was advised that scrutiny would maintain overview of two Boards - Health and Children's Services.

Priority 3: 'We want every child to have a good school place in Sandwell.' Sandwell had the fastest growing population in schools from 2011, there had been a 60% increase and work was underway to provide the additional school places needed. The Board was advised that the primary school building programme had recently been completed and that the authority was in the middle of building three secondary schools in Sandwell. It was confirmed that local authority schools could no longer be built, therefore, every new school was an academy school.

Priority 4: 'We want every child in Sandwell to have the very best start in life.' The Board was advised that the authority was working with partners and schools to improve school readiness. Early intervention and schools being ready for the children was important to a good start at school. The development of the early years transformation academy was a priority for Sandwell, with GP's, midwifery, children's childcare and everything else that impacted on pre-school children, to join up into one seamless service. Numbers of children and new parents constantly changed and there was a need to work with the whole family. The Board was advised that progress was being made, however, more was needed to change and to reduce the gap between Sandwell and the national standard.

Priority 5: 'We want children to be better prepared for adulthood.' The Board was advised that the Authority was working with schools to develop the curriculum, in communities and with businesses, to

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board – 24 June, 2019

ensure children were prepared for the life ahead. The Board was advised that 85% of young people received careers advice from their parents and that there was a need to talk to and support young people.

Priority 6: 'Every young person should be aware of career opportunities that are available in Sandwell.'

The inclusive growth agenda in Sandwell and through the West Midlands Combined Authority area was important to ensure that jobs and skills were retained in Sandwell, and that local economy growth was sustained.

The Directors highlighted key themes for the Scrutiny Board in Sandwell including the national focus, and they highlighted the need for scrutiny to consider what was happening to address local and national issues, and to consider how Sandwell was tackling or implementing them.

The National issues were:

- school exclusions and alternate provision, including Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and off-rolling;
- illegal schools;
- relationships, sex education and health education in schools;
- knife crime;
- funding: education and children's services;
- staffing: training, recruitment and retention;
- special educational needs and disability (SEND);
- numbers and cost of children in care;
- child exploitation;
- child mental health;
- children 'locked up';
- early years and early help.

The Board considered the information they had received, and the following matters were noted: -

- play and youth services had been discussed by the Board on 18 March 2019 and an update report was requested to 11 November 2019 meeting to consider how the new Cabinet Member proposed to take forward Play and Youth Services, with further detail on resource and roles, and to consider what the service could do and what it could not;

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
24 June, 2019**

- the SHAPE programme, funded by Public Health, organised events throughout the year for children and young people. SHAPE's objective was to listen to the voice of children and young people in Sandwell using five themes, an update report was requested as part of the work programme;
- in relation to young people not in education employment or training (NEET), Sandwell had performed well with low figures compared to all other members of the West Midlands Combined Authority. Solihull was the only Local Authority ahead of Sandwell performance. The focus for scrutiny should relate to sustained good work and to focus on NEET aged 25-29;
- further information about special educational needs and disability (SEND) was requested;
- more information about 'alternative provision' and what that looked like in Sandwell was requested. It was suggested that the focus of alternate provision should include information on pupil referral units (PRUs), the 30-40 alternative providers and training and work experience;
- the Board agreed to carry out a site visit to a PRU;
- information about the work Sandwell was proposing to do on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) was requested;
- attendance at school in Sandwell was generally just below national average but fluctuated;
- the Board discussed school funding and resources in schools in Sandwell and was advised that there were approximately 10 schools critical for funding out of 120 schools in the Borough. Two schools went into debt in 2018-19 and there were concerns that every school was looking closely at resources and staffing cuts, primary schools and secondary school funding differed, the Board questioned where the ratio should be between primary and secondary school spending;
- more information about the pupil premium, how it worked and how it was being used was requested. The Director advised that use of pupil premium was at the discretion of the schools. Looked after children (LAC) received a 'pupil premium plus', which the council carefully considered how to use for each LAC child;
- mental health in schools, CAMHS and why young people were self-harming were all identified by Board members as potential issues to include on the work programme. There was an appetite to carry out cross cutting with work with the Health Scrutiny Board on this issue;

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board – 24 June, 2019

- healthy eating in schools and childhood obesity were also issues considered for cross cutting with work in the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board;
- 'County lines', drugs and knife crime were highlighted as issues for young people in school and in the community. County lines was a term used when drug gangs from big cities expanded their operations to smaller towns. The Board was advised that the 'Schools and Police Panel' was started in October 2018, the panel was a safe place where schools could highlight issues in confidence and police could share information to develop relationships and support for schools. The panel wanted to look at issues such as knife arches (metal detectors) in schools and follow up summits in the school to focus on prevention rather than exclusion;
- the police were sharing good practice and information about Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and arrests had been made with the press and social media to raise awareness. Further information, statistics and initiatives were requested by members as part of the work programme;
- the Board wanted to know more about what was being done to keep vulnerable young people safe at home, those on the edge of care at age 14-16 years old. What were the innovations in service and whose responsibility it was to deliver earlier services to keep them safe. The Sandwell Community and Voluntary Organisation (SCVO), voluntary sector had been working hard to deliver services and the Board requested a visit to see how well the Children's Trust and Voluntary sector were working together.
- Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) was required to attend the Scrutiny Board twice a year. The first-year annual review and updated SCT Improvement Plan would be considered at the meeting on 23 September 2019;
- the Board wanted to hear more about the delivery of the national programme for sex and relationship education, Public Health would be taking a lead in Sandwell. The early years sex and relationship education would be age appropriate and would focus on relationships, what was appropriate and not appropriate and consent. There was an updated contract with the commissioned service which had included the re-introduction of free condoms for young people;
- adoption services were discussed, and a performance update was requested, including the Ofsted report showing improvement and more information about 'Adoption at Heart' Regional Adoption Agency working arrangements;

**Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board –
24 June, 2019**

- the Board wanted to hear more about education and young carers from the Cabinet Member for 'Best Start in Life' who had made this a priority in her work programme;
- the Board requested an overview and more information about the 4% of Sandwell Schools that were in special measures. The Director of Education advised that some would convert to academies, some would improve, and that the situation was flexible, dependant on several factors, such as what the leadership was like and whether a change in leadership could bring about change.

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation and responses provided to Members questions.

The Chair advised the Board that it was the duty of the Board to set a realistic work programme from the long list of items discussed at the meeting. He advised that the Cabinet Member- Best start in life and the Directors would be consulted to advise on the prioritisation of the work programme.

The Chair encouraged all members of the Board to consider the topics discussed and to take a lead on a topic from the work programme. He suggested that the members prepare questions in advance of the scheduled meetings and try to attend the site visits that have been highlighted during the discussions.

The Chair advised that he could provide all members with opportunity to meet or correspond with him in advance of Scrutiny Board meetings, to highlight potential issues or lines of enquiry arising from the reports.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution at the meeting and advised that he would work with officers to prepare the work programme for the Board.

(Meeting ended at 6.25 pm)

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