

Minutes of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

22th July, 2019 at 5.00 pm
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor Singh (Chair);
Councillor Preece (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Allen, Chidley, Z Hussain and McVittie.

Apologies: Councillors Ashman, Carmichael, Costigan,
Phillips and Shackleton;
C Ward-Lewis and T Majid (Co-opted members).

In attendance: Chris Ward, Director of Education, Skills and
Employment;
Lisa McNally, Director of Public Health.

12/19 **Declaration of Interest**

Councillor Allen declared a personal interest at the meeting in relation to youth service provision as his son was an employee of Sandwell Council Youth Services.

13/19 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 June, 2019 be approved as a correct record.

14/19 **Education Services**

The Board received a presentation from the Director - Education, Skills and Employment to provide an update on Education Services in Sandwell.

The presentation highlighted the following: -

- the current structure in Education, Skills and Employment Directorate;
- the functions and key work of the three service areas:-

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- Learning Improvement included schools support commissioning, Post 16 learning and early years and childcare;
- Education Support Services included school organisation, attendance and prosecution, transport assistance, Sandwell residential education centres and business administration;
- Inclusive Learning included special educational needs and disability (SEND) provision, SEND early years, inclusion support, pupil inclusion and SEND business team.

The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions: -

Learning Improvement:

- the percentage of Sandwell primary schools rated good or better by Ofsted ranges between 83% - 90% depending on the Ofsted inspection cycle and the point of the school year;
- secondary school performance was much improved and had increased from 43% to 75% of schools performance rated as good or better;
- academies do access additional support from the Local Authority, some support can be charged for, other universal services such as Special Educational Needs services were available;
- a specialist transition co-ordinator assisted school and pupil transfers, key stage 3 (KS3) transfers could cause the biggest issues for the student who were leaving a school where everyone knew everyone, into a place where they would need to settle in;
- there was an increase of new arrivals to Sandwell reported; many of these young people attended the Assessment Centre (STEPS). Many of the new arrivals to Sandwell wanted a place in the Smethwick area, which was putting a real strain on school places in the area;
- it was reported that many new arrivals to the UK seemed keen to learn and schools welcomed them;
- there were three Sandwell adult family learning centres (SAFL) in Sandwell to help with developing skills and learning. There was an interest in working with young mothers, females around the age of 30 - 40 and to focus on worklessness in Sandwell;
- there was an identified need to reduce the numbers of NEETS particularly in the age bracket 19-25;

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- there were over 98 pre-school providers delivering what children needed to prepare them for school and to get the best start in life.

Education Support Services:

- Sandwell Council was working closely with the Department for Education (DfE) to build sufficient school places in Sandwell. The birth rate had increased substantially in Sandwell a few years ago from 3,500 births to 5,000 per annum, this had recently levelled at 5,000 per annum, but the Council needed to build more schools to meet the requirements caused by the higher birth-rate;
- primary schools and places were more difficult to organise due to the infant class size legislation limiting children to 30 per class;
- in recent years the number of school admission appeals had increased, and it was a very busy time of the year trying to sort places for each child that suited the parents' and the children's needs. The Board was advised that high majority of parents were getting their first, second or third preference but that it was getting more difficult.
- The Government had not funded the 5% pupil place surplus that was required to ease the situation; Sandwell was nearly filling every school place in the Borough;
- the Board noted that the reputation of a school had an impact on the numbers of children that wanted to go there, or conversely, not wishing to go there. The Board was advised that the key to reducing school admissions appeals was to raise the standard of all schools to good and outstanding as it offers parents more choice;
- the specialist team that dealt with free school meals and the pupil premium had helped to draw down £14.8million of extra funding for schools and this was outstanding for a team of four people;
- the Authority also helped out with transport and uniform support; many Councils no longer provided this support;
- Older SEND children were being encouraged to travel independently and to be prepared for the transition to further education or work. The number of children transitioning to mainstream secondary schools depended on what was in their Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP), many children with autism could be managed in school and did not require a special school placement;

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- Sandwell maintained four outside education centres which had wide-ranging curriculum for younger children. Many other Local Authorities had disposed of their outdoor centres.

Inclusive Learning:

- Sandwell was supporting 2100 young people with EHCPs. This number had increased from 1200 in 2014 to 2100 in 2019. Consequently, the number of assessments and cost of placements had increased substantially, it was noted that one placement could cost up to £100,000;
- It was reported that the DfE was getting pressure to put more money into SEN departments;
- Sandwell Children's Trust was working alongside the Council to assist with diagnosis and needs assessment for children with SEND;
- assistance was given to young people excluded from a school or 'hard to place' to find a school place, their support needs were catered for, and they were helped back into education;
- primary school Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) were temporary placements for some children, it was more difficult to manage children in Key stage 3 & 4 PRUs where pupil cases were often more complicated;
- children from PRUs were supported back into education, apprenticeships and university, success rates of these cases were monitored, and statistical data could be circulated to the Board;
- during the summer school holiday play services and some clubs had access to some school premises and facilities, but generally school premises were closed to community and other use.

The Board noted that the Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life was carrying out work relating to Care Leavers and that Education Services were working more closely with health care providers at the earliest opportunity to identify and work with pre-school children. Early identification of dyslexia and autism would enable EHCPs to be put in place for when children started in primary schools.

Resolved that the Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life be invited to a future meeting to present an update on her work priorities.

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Child Health Services

The Board received a presentation from the Director of Public Health which gave an overview of Child Health Services in Sandwell. She presented case studies to highlight what was working well in the Borough and to discuss what was not going well. The Board welcomed the reported high immunisation take up rate and that Sandwell had a lower than national average number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET).

The Board heard that Sandwell had significantly higher than national average rates of child poverty, child obesity and social emotional and mental health needs in the secondary school population. Three quarters of Public Health spend was spent on the following:

- children's health;
- services and initiatives such as health visitors;
- maternity services;
- school readiness;
- clubs providing meals during school holidays;
- sexual health services;
- emotional support and wellbeing.

The services were making life more manageable for the children who had challenges in life and at home and the Board welcomed that young people were responding and showing good results in relation to improved self-esteem and self-confidence.

The Board was pleased to hear that a recent BBC programme 'Women's Hour' had spotlighted the work happening in Sandwell as national best practice and many more affluent local authorities were looking at what was happening in Sandwell as good practice.

The Board noted that often teachers did identify issues with young people in classrooms but that they needed more help in schools to be able to deal with wellbeing and mental health matters. The normal position would be for a school to report or refer an individual to mental health services for assessment.

The Board was advised that Sandwell was developing a Well Being Charter Mark which, although resource intensive, was really cost effective. The Director advised that it was unusual for a psychologist to be working closely with the schools, but that this was ground breaking work in Sandwell and it was recognised nationwide as good practice. The scheme had been running for one year, 93 schools

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were currently engaged with the programme and the others would be taking part soon. The Well Being programme was considered to be good practice, with elements coming from the Green Paper already contained in the programme.

The Board noted that some children in Sandwell were known not to attend school because they were being bullied by others for a variety of reasons. The period poverty campaign #GirlCodeSandwell was an example of how Sandwell schools were working to inform, support and help provide sanitary products for girls in schools. The Board noted that the programme was run by young people for young people, schools loved it, all schools had received a box with products that were replenished by donations. The aim was to provide free products to those that needed them and improve health education and awareness. The Council was also working with partner organisations such as Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals Foundation Trust to roll out the programme in Sandwell.

The Board noted that the SHAPE Programme was a corporate programme that had been in operation since December 2014. Initially the programme gave young people a voice and sought the views of young people in everything that Sandwell did - staying safe, being healthy, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and economic wellbeing. Since establishment, SHAPE had engaged with 25% of the population of 0-25 year olds and had engaged with 54% of primary schools, 94% of secondary schools and 57% of pupil referral units and special schools. The Board noted that the SHAPE forum met most Thursday nights and members highlighted that they wanted to attend a SHAPE meeting and to invite SHAPE members to a scrutiny meeting. The SHAPE programme was more than a consultation vehicle and that regular events and awareness sessions were arranged to educate and inform young people and that there were opportunities for young people to get involved.

The Board highlighted the need to promote the work they carried out through press releases and social media posts.

Resolved

- (1) that The Director of Public Health make arrangements for Scrutiny Board Members to visit the SHAPE forum and meet young people;

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- (2) that representatives of SHAPE be invited to attend a Scrutiny Board meeting to present its work programme.

(Meeting ended at 6.20 pm)

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