

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

**27 January, 2020 at 5.00 pm  
at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillor Singh (Chair);  
Councillor Preece (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors Ashman, Chidley, Z Hussain, McVittie,  
Millar, Phillips and Shackleton.

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

**In attendance:** Lesley Hagger, Executive Director Children's  
Services;  
Sue Moore, Group Head, Education Support  
Services  
Chris Ward, Director of Education, Skills and  
Employment;  
Moira Tallents, SEN Advisor.

1/20 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 11  
November 2019 be approved as a correct record.

2/20 **Annual Admissions**

The Board received a report and presentation from the Group Head, Education Support Services which provided an update on School Admissions. The report provided a summary of numbers of appeals and performance, to demonstrate how the Council had continued to meet school preferences against the background of higher demand.

The Board was advised that nearly 10,000 annual applications were processed per year and that in 2019 there were 4908 year 7, and 4519 reception applications, with a significant number of late requests also being received and processed up to the start of the school year in September.

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The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions:

- 2019 had the largest secondary school cohort for many years. The number of applications for the Sandwell Academy was high (1500) for the number of places available;
- provision of over 5000 new primary places had increased Local Authority ability to meet parental preference and a lower birth rate was responsible for a lower reception cohort;
- the Board considered that there may be potential for too many secondary places in the future, however successful management and introduction of the bulge classes had kept the numbers in check, the Local Authority (LA) had been putting temporary places in as projections altered year on year;
- the delay of DfE funded projects to increase secondary places had impacted on school place planning; the Chance Academy would open in 2023 and the CBSO Shireland Collegiate free school would open in 2022;
- the LA had a statutory duty to offer parents a preference, many operated with a 5–10% surplus places policy, Sandwell operated at 2-3%, which explained why figures presented for school appeals were higher this year;
- in relation to academies the Board was advised that most of the year 7 places were full, but that there were some places available in higher year groups;
- many parents selected their school preferences based on the reputation of a school, the rating of a school or that they wanted their children to go to the same school they and their family, or siblings, had attended;
- in 2019 there were 1,500 applications for Sandwell Academy and only 200 places were available, the appeals for a school place at this school were considerably higher than other schools and accounted for 30% of the total secondary school appeals last year;
- the Sandwell Academy school was attractive to parents because it was a new school, in the top 3 for performance in Sandwell and was a good example of how Sandwell children could achieve academically and in their sporting ambitions. The school intake included pupils from the six towns spread across the Borough, other schools based their offer on distance from the door;

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- the West Bromwich Collegiate school was a new school and had received 600 applications for 150 places;
- it was acknowledged that more places were required in secondary schools, that the number in primary school places had levelled out, but that there were another four years of secondary school growth to manage;
- all secondary schools followed the national admissions code and were co-ordinated by the Local Authority;
- some parents chose the option to home school their children and a full-time home education officer was in post to monitor progress;
- parents could only appeal for a place at a school once in the school year;
- the success rate for school appeals in Sandwell was less than 3%;
- there were fewer successful primary appeals due to the permitted number of 30 children per class.

The Board welcomed the success of the Sandwell Academy and were pleased to hear that learning was shared across secondary schools in Sandwell via a Headteachers Forum which met every six weeks. The Board noted that the headteacher of the Sandwell Academy School and other headteachers visited each other's schools and held regular meetings of subject groups in schools to learn from each other.

The Chair thanked officers for the update report and was pleased that progress was being made with admissions arrangements in Sandwell but highlighted that there was a need for more focus on secondary school admissions.

### **Resolved**

- (1) that Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board noted the report and request further information relating to the percentage and number of successful school appeals in primary and secondary schools in Sandwell for 2018-19.

4/20

### **Exclusions and Alternative Provision**

The Board received a report and presentation from the Group Head, Inclusive Learning Services which provided an update on how the Council worked with schools in managing the exclusion of pupils and

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provided suitable alternative educational provisions where necessary.

The Board welcomed that the overall the number of fixed term and permanent exclusions had decreased for the last four years, and that the percentage of pupils in Sandwell receiving a fixed term exclusion from school was less than the national and regional averages.

The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions:

- there was a downward trend in numbers of pupils excluded in primary and secondary schools from 2016 to 2019 and it was recognised that this was attributed to Local Authority support and developments in relation to intensive support, targeted support and whole school support;
- the whole school approach would provide more preventative work in schools and there would be additional support, from April 2020, with graduated approach mental health workers going into 20 schools;
- community policing was working with primary school children through the bliss system and this would be expanded to secondary school exclusions;
- the new Alternative Provision (AP) Panel had been formed to provide a single route and accountability to the decision makers. It would refer a variety of cases, international new arrivals and those with behavioural or health issues into alternative provision;
- the AP Panel consisted of senior officers (senior leaders from school and Local Authority) and the independent Chair of the Fair Access Panel. The Panel would follow the new Ofsted Inspection framework to visit, offer advice and guidance to Headteachers and consider learning from other Local Authorities;

The Board noted that the pupil referral units had improved provision and that it was intended to reduce exclusions to an absolute minimum by making fewer permanent exclusions, carrying out more preventative work and moving young people back into school.

The Board was advised that the Albright Education Centre and the Primrose Centre were moving towards a respite centre ethos. There would be improved medical provision at Albright Education Centre (formally Whiteheath Education Centre) which provided education for pupils who could not attend mainstream school and they aimed to

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return more young people to school who may have been anxious or school phobic. There had been an increase in numbers of pupils unable to attend school due to mental health problems, as a result, Schools' Forum had recently agreed to fund an additional 10 school places.

There would be an improved 'revolving door' process at Primrose Centre with more preventative school places available. Sandwell Community School had a specified role at each campus, offered preventive places, reintegration and attendance at fair access panels.

The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions:

- the Quality and Standards Board monitored numbers and breakdown of school exclusions through trends overtime, to avoid singling out a particular school or schools;
- every school was reducing exclusions year on year and the number of days lost had reduced substantially in the three-year period by more than half from 5,525 to 2,031.5;
- there was a push back against zero tolerance policy and an encouragement of schools to give a balanced approach when addressing preventative work and exclusions;
- the Fair Access Team managed the process, but there was concern that people who did not have English as a first language found the process difficult and there was a need to consider the process in the corporate parent role;
- young people with social, emotional and mental health issues were being identified and targeted work would be carried out with them in their school;
- isolation booths were the topic of debate following a television documentary relating to Educating Yorkshire and their use of isolation booths. The Board was assured that isolation booths were not used in Sandwell, there were occasions where a young person would be removed from a situation if they were difficult or causing disruption, they would remain with an adult until their behaviour recovered;
- there was other alternative provision in the form of private schools which were smaller in class size, such as Sandwell Valley School;
- other unregistered provision was also available – if a young person attended more than 18 hours per week it would have to be registered as an independent school;

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- Ofsted monitored alternative provision and the Local Authority was aware of which children were where and for how long;

The Board noted that there had been an increase in budget of £7 million from government this year for Sandwell's special needs and special provision.

The Board noted the following comments and response to questions relating to performance:

- success was measured by the numbers of children in attendance and their progress. One way to get young people back into full time education was to offer them something that interested them, such as vocational learning;
- Ofsted monitored alternative provision and there had been some interest on the success and quality of service of alternative provision in Sandwell;
- teaching staff received professional development to help them, but sometimes this lacked impact on the disruption caused in classes and it was suggested that often the easier thing was to remove the young people from the class.
- the support team was being expanded to support staff in schools to take care of their mental health and adopting an all school approach to mental health and wellbeing;
- it was recognised that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) had an impact on young people in secondary schools and there was a drive to identify symptoms in young people earlier, but not to label them;
- the Executive Director thanked the teams for their excellent work

The Board highlighted the need to look at how to improve things for the 36 excluded young people, to look at the common themes for exclusion, if they were involved in other work such as violence reduction and the impact of the revolving door policy for these young people.

The Chair welcomed the work being done and the approach being taken to reducing exclusions in Sandwell. The Board noted the focus on prevention and was pleased that good services were emerging, trends for exclusions were going down and that partners were working together.

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**Resolved**

- (1) That a report be requested to a future meeting to clarify the following:
  - i. what were the main reasons for exclusions
  - ii. how does the Council support better collaboration, providing a graphical analysis (causality of the issues, ethnicity, primary/secondary, which schools);
  - iii. how was the revolving door policy being implemented, could we improve on 36 permanently excluded;
  - iv. How can we understand and help improve young people? (Mental health support workers earlier support) that young people.

5/20

**Youth Facilities Scrutiny Review**

The Board received a report which set out the rationale and scope for the proposed review of Youth Facilities. The purpose of the review was to find out what young people have, need and want from their youth facilities in Sandwell.

The Board noted that the review would be supported by a core group of officers and the evidence gathering would reach a wide range of public, partners and youth service providers, and would include visits to facilities and forums to meet and talk to a range of stakeholders and services users, and a question time styled session to ask questions of expert witnesses.

The Board was advised that the evidence gathering activities would take place throughout February 2020 and that a schedule would be circulated to Members to enable them to participate in the planned activities and sessions for the review.

The Executive Director advised that a survey due to be circulated via the Councils website and social media would be transferred to a young person friendly document. She advised that young people had indicated that they wanted to be involved in the delivery of the scrutiny review as young scrutineers.

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The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions:

- Members could visit youth facilities on a town basis and feedback their findings to the Democratic Services Team;
- Rowley Regis had no youth club;
- Coneygre Centre was considered by Members to be a fantastic arts and drama facility;
- the Youth Service only had two buildings but were in conversation with Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT) to open other buildings up to the Youth Service;
- there was a need to be realistic in the review and to recognise that the Youth Service may not have enough capacity to open new facilities with current resources;
- there was a need for a sufficiency statement to demonstrate if there were enough facilities to meet demand and to demonstrate where there were gaps;
- a sufficiency statement would provide evidence to support any future funding bids, including a potential bid for Town Development Fund which should take into account young people's needs in addition to the local economy;
- Members welcomed the flexibility of the evidence sessions, to do things in their own ward or across the Borough according to their capacity;
- other youth activities and facilities were suggested by the Board, including sea cadets, guides and scouts;
- involving young people who were not attending youth facilities was seen as a challenge, young people on street corners, on bus stops, Members identified a need to find out what they needed and wanted as well;
- A police led forum would be arranged to focus on young people who were not engaged in current facilities;
- A BAME forum would be arranged to consider involving all communities including young carers;
- further research was requested in relation to Stoke youth facilities and what had been done there.

The Chair invited all members to become involved in the Youth Facilities Review evidence gathering and invited Members to join the core Review Group to meet to consider the feedback from evidence gathering and prepare a summary report and recommendations to Scrutiny Board.



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The Chair thanked officers for their work and welcomed the participation and contribution of members to this important review of youth facilities. The first meeting of the review group would take place Wednesday 5th February, a background report, lines of enquiry and schedules of visits would be confirmed at meeting.

Recommendation:

- (1) that the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board agreed the scope of the Youth Facilities Review Group;
- (2) that Councillors Chidley, McVittie, Preece and Singh be appointed to the Youth Facilities Review Group;
- (3) that all members of the Scrutiny Board participate in the visits to youth facilities in their ward and where possible further across the Borough;
- (4) that the report of the Youth Facilities Review be presented to a future meeting of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board.

(Meeting ended at 6.38 pm)

Contact Officer: Deb Breedon Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3896
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