

Agenda

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Monday 15 March 2021 at 5.00pm

The meeting will be conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams in accordance with The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020

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This agenda gives notice of items to be considered in private as required by Regulations 5 (4) and (5) of The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

1 Apologies for Absence

2 Declarations of Interest

Members to declare any interests in matters to be discussed at the meeting

3 Minutes

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 201 as a correct record



4 **Urgent Item of Business**

To determine whether there are any additional items of business arising which should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency.

5. **Reset and Recovery Plan**

To consider a brief update presentation on reset and recovery plan.

6. **Examination - A level and GCSE moderating (14.01.21)**

To provide a report and consider a presentation on A level and GCSE moderating

7. **Recommissioning of Children's Centres**

To consider an update report on recommissioning of Children's Centres

8. **Holiday Activities and Food Scheme**

To provide a report on Holiday Activities and Food Scheme

9. **EHE Working Group Update**

Update from chair of the EHE Working Group

Distribution

Councillors Preece (Vice-Chair);

Councillors Ashman, Carmichael, Chidley, Costigan, Z Hussain, McVittie, Millar, Phillips and Shackleton.

Co-opted Members:-

Charlotte Ward-Lewis (Church of England Diocese representative)

Vacant (Roman Catholic Archdiocese representative)

Tahira Majid (Primary School Governor representative)

Vacant (Secondary School Governor representative)

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Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Apologies for Absence

The Board will receive any apologies for absence from the members of the Board.



Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Declarations of Interests

Members to declare:-

- (a) any interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting;
- (b) the existence and nature of any political Party Whip on any matter to be considered at the meeting.



Minutes of the Children's Services and Education Board

11 January 2021 at 5.00 pm
Virtual Online Meeting

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

Also present: Lesley Hagger, Executive Director Children's Services;
Chris Ward, Director Education, Employment and
Skills;
Sue Moore, Group Head Education Support Services;
Graham Pennington, Principal Sandwell College;
David Holden, Deputy Principal Sandwell College;
Jason Henderson, Department for Education

1/21 Apologies

Apologies were received from C Ward-Lewis (Co-opted member)

2/21 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared at the meeting

3/21 Minutes

Agreed: that the minutes of the meeting held on 16
November 2020 approved as a correct record.



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4/21 Additional Item of Business

There were no additional items of business to consider.

5/21 Reset and Recovery – Update

The Board received a presentation from the Executive Director of Children's Services to provide a progress update relating to the reset and recovery plan for the period November 2020 to date.

The Board noted that Children's Services had continued to be extremely busy since the last meeting, business as usual had been maintained across the service and staff had been brilliant. The following was noted by the Board:

- Staff had been volunteering and supporting other areas, schools where staff had been responding to enquiries from parents, supporting with risk assessments and monitoring incidents of positive coronavirus tests of staff and pupils.
- Children's Services staff absence had been low and the majority of those who were self-isolating had continued to work.
- Pressures were beginning to emerge within the SEND service, Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments that required face to face meetings were encountering delays due to current restrictions.
- A high level of scrutiny and contact with Ofsted and the Department for Education (DfE) had been maintained. Questions and requests for support had been escalated and good practice had been shared.
- Ofsted had made 12 successful visits to Borough schools and assurance visits were planned to begin in February. A lot of preparation had been undertaken and there were a lot of positives that could be communicated to Ofsted. An increase



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in referrals had resulted in a growing pressure on Children's Social Care following and there would be subsequent pressure on placements.

- Due to the coronavirus children were not leaving care and costs continued to increase. Free School Meals (FSM) had continued over the Christmas period and plans to continue FSM were in place for February half-term. The Winter Grant Scheme was noted to have distributed £1.4 million, 80% of which went families with children.
- The Executive Director of Children's Services highlighted the success of the Children's Services Team:
 - In the MJ awards, the award for Innovation in Children's Services, went to the team for the STEPS Centre.
 - The team was a finalist for the Children and Young People Now Awards for Children in Care for the Sandwell Careers Interview Guarantee Scheme, the scheme had led to a reduction of those young people identified as NEET from 24% in 2017 to 6% in 2020.
 - A member of staff was shortlisted for the National NSPCC Award, recognising their outstanding practice in the implementation of the Graded Care Profile 2 (Neglect Programme).
 - Another member of staff had received an MBE in recognition of their work in school inclusion.
- There had been excellent engagement between the Local Authority, Early Years, schools, academies and Sandwell College regarding implementing Government guidance. Guidance, had taken longer than expected to be rolled out, however schools had been proactive in learning the lessons from the first lock-down and were able to operate safely.
- There had been an increase in the number of laptop/mobile devices available to schools and pupils and schools were now more adapted to manage the online provision.
- Cabinet members had been receiving daily updates from the service and a weekly update was provided for all councillors.



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- There had also been an ongoing engagement with the Trade Unions in relation to staff working safely.
- The Vulnerable Children Group continued to meet and there was confidence in the continued safety and education of vulnerable children and young people. Families of Extremely vulnerable children within Sandwell continued to be contacted and signposted towards support.
 - There had been an increase in the complexity of cases with children being at home more, it was regarded to have led to an increase in children experiencing harm, a recent Ofsted report had highlighted this. A campaign was ongoing with focus on Safe-Sleeping and the prevention of suicides, material was being distributed to schools.
 - Regular communication had been maintained across Children's Services including the Sandwell Children's Trust, the Reset and Recovery Board, the Vulnerable Children's Group, SIMT and the Vulnerable People Cell meetings. There also continued to be regular communication and engagement with external partners including education providers and safeguarding partnerships, along with Ofsted and the DfE.
 - It was important to continue to hear the voices of children and young people and their families.

The Board noted the focus of the service going forward:

- To continue to update and implement guidance.
- To pursue the access to mass testing for schools and children – the Board emphasised the importance of testing and vaccinations in supporting front-line staff.
- To roll-out holiday activities and food-schemes over Easter, summer and Christmas holidays with Government funding identified for that scheme.
- To continue to work with schools regarding testing.
- To plan for Ofsted inspections and focussed visit relating to supporting vulnerable children.
- To carry out an induction process for the new CEO of the Sandwell Children's Trust.



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- To consult on keeping children safe in education.

The Chair welcomed the hard work staff had demonstrated through the last 12 months.

The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions:

- the definition of 'Key Workers' had changed since the first lock-down in March 2020 to include a wider range of frontline workers, as a consequence, it had been reported that numbers of children attending school had increased significantly.
- In terms of attendance data for Sandwell schools it was reported that the DfE had only recently reinstated the collection of the data and figures were not yet available. The Director advised that four or five schools were recording pupil attendance at around 40% and that the situation would be monitored going forward and the matter would be raised with the DfE.
- In terms of teacher's clarity on Government guidance it was stated that teachers do know what they are doing, despite some questions they had concerning the guidance and that queries had been raised with the DfE.
- Following pressure from the teaching unions regarding earlier vaccination of frontline teaching staff, it was confirmed that no commitment had been received from government and this had been raised with the DfE and a response was expected.
- It was confirmed that Cabinet would be requested to approve the appointment of the new CEO of the Sandwell Children's Trust with effect from 5th April 2021. It was noted that following Cabinet approval the CEO would be attending meetings before the start date. The Chair extended an invitation to the new CEO (to be communicated through the Executive Director Children's Services) for them to attend the next Scrutiny Board on 15th March.



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- It was confirmed that some face to face meetings were proving difficult to arrange due to current restrictions and that there were delays for some children and young people who require face to face assessments for Education Health Care Plans and similar assessments, however delays were not currently at a stage where the Service was concerned, rather it was something to monitor going forward.
- There had been an 18% increase in children requiring Free School Meals compared to this time last year.
- Schools were not receiving extra funding up front from the government for the purchase of cleaning and personal hygiene resources, schools were making retrospective claims.
- Further data regarding the Winter Support Grant Scheme would be circulated to Members.
- The prevention of suicide and its prevalence with young people in the Borough was of concern to the Board. It was confirmed that there had sadly been a couple of very serious incidents in Sandwell recently and that efforts had been stepped up in schools to encourage young people to come forward and talk about issues if they needed to.

The Board supported a suggestion to hold a celebratory event for the Children's Services staff in recognition of those who had gone 'above and beyond' in their work, in relation to Children and Education, over the course of the pandemic.

The Chair indicated that an award event was already planned for Council staff which may encompass this suggestion. It was agreed to clarify the nature of the awards event currently planned and report back to the next Board meeting.

The Chair thanked the Executive Director Children's Services and the Director of Education, Employment and Skills for the update report and for their responses to questions.



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Agreed:

- 1) The Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board noted the update report and agreed that officers action the following matters:
 - a. The new Chief Executive of the Sandwell Children's Trust (SCT) be invited to attend the next scrutiny board meeting on the 15th March, pending Cabinet approval of the appointment;
 - b. Current data relating to numbers of children entitled to Free School Meals in Sandwell be circulated to members of the Board;
 - c. Data relating to Winter Support Grant applications and allocations be circulated to members of the Board;
 - d. Information relating to a 'celebratory event' for Children's Services staff be considered at the next meeting of the Board.

6/21

Proposed Changes to Vocational Qualifications

The Principal and Deputy Principal of Sandwell College presented a report relating to the proposed change to vocational qualifications and its implications for the future of the College. The report set out the key themes of Sandwell Colleges response to the Government consultation.

The Principal thanked the Board for inviting him to speak on the matter and provided a brief overview of Sandwell College and its work in the community as a large supplier of post-16 educational and training provision.



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The Board noted that the College currently enrolled around 6,200 young people across its campuses, the College also enrolled 4,000 adult learners and employed hundreds of staff. The College worked hard to become more inclusive and offer more opportunities to students from all backgrounds. The Principal advised that the College had developed a partnership with the University of Wolverhampton to afford young people the opportunity to progress from the College to University. He advised that should a recent bid by the College, to the Towns Fund, be successful the College hoped to expand its campuses and vocational training, with a focus on health and adult care, and manufacturing sectors.

The Board noted that students had been making progress in terms of qualification attainment. In recent years there had been an increase in the number of young people progressing from Level 1 and 2 qualifications to Level 3, with a number of these students progressing to university. There had been a large increase in young people undertaking BTEC qualifications, which had become more demanding for students and had widened their future opportunities. The principal explained to the Board that the government was consulting on proposals to remove funding for BTECs and instead focus on T Levels. He explained that the T Level was a new qualification which would restrict the choice for young people, predetermine educational pathways and may result in young people not being able to progress to university. He voiced concern that the change could impact social mobility for those young people. Government consultation on this change ended at the end of the week and asked if members would want to respond on behalf of the Local Authority.

The Deputy Principal explained that BTEC qualifications had given young people from a BAME background an opportunity to access vocational and higher education. The Board noted that



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BTEC classes would often be comprised of 80% BAME students and that the move away from BTECs and towards T Levels may see BAME students disadvantaged. The Principal suggested that not having a BTEC option could increase the number of students who are NEET in the long term.

The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions:

- In terms of the T Level and its potential impact on young people in Sandwell. One of the main issues was that the T Level included a requirement for work-experience, young people were required to undertake 300-900 hours of unpaid work as part of the qualification. For many young people in Sandwell this may not be an option. The government had not taken into consideration the young people who were disadvantaged. Another issue was that it was unclear how effective the T Level would be, the scope was narrow, and a young person may not have the foundation to progress to university after undertaking the course.
- BTECs were broad in their study and application while T Levels had the potential to be limiting and narrow in choice.
- It was clarified that there was no objection to T levels but that there was a need to retain BTECs as well.
- Cllr Shackleton emphasised how important vocational qualifications were and that it was important that complexities not be added.
- Young people and parents had not been consulted on these changes and it was questioned whether young people would think about the long-term implications at their age. The Principal advised that the College Student Council collected feedback from students.
- It was considered that Government was pursuing the line that A Levels would lead to university while T Levels would lead to work, but individual circumstance had not been taken into account.



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The Chair thanked the Principal and Deputy Principal of Sandwell College for bring the matter to the attention of the Board and for responding to questions.

The Board considered the merits of BTECs and how they benefit the young people of Sandwell. It was the consensus of the Board that a response should be made by the Local Authority to the Government consultation taking into account the comments of the Board.

The Chair requested that Cllr Millar, on behalf of the Scrutiny Board, work with the Executive Director of Children's to prepare a draft response, to be signed off by the Cabinet Members for Best Start in Life and Employment and Skills.

Agreed:

- 1) That the Executive Director Children's Services and Councillor Millar prepare a response to the Governments consultation on proposed changes to vocational qualifications; and the Cabinet Members for Best Start in Life and Employment and Skills be requested to sign off and submit the Councils response.

7/21

Elective Home Education Working Group

The Chair provided a brief overview of the progress of the Elective Home Education Working Group. He outlined the key lines of enquiry and the evidence gathering activities that had been undertaken.



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The Board noted that surveys had been carried out with parents and children in Elective Home Education (EHE) and that an assessment of feedback had been undertaken to identify the current support offer in Sandwell. The Chair indicated that a focus group with parents and advisory teachers had taken place which had been a useful and valuable exercise, clear and honest responses were collected, and many parents have had positive experiences with the Local Authority, however there were those whose experiences were more mixed.

The Chair outlined the next steps for the EHE Working Group, there was a workshop planned with teachers and headteachers, to gain a teaching perspective on elective home education and the group continued to analyse the evidence as it was collected.

The Group Head Education Support Services emphasised the importance of the evidence collection and advised that the EHE service continued to look both locally and nationally to identify best practice. She advised that the final report of the group would be developed in light of the evidence and research and should be very comprehensive.

The Board noted that the numbers of pupils being home educated continued to rise. Numbers were being monitored to see if the current increase in numbers dropped again following a relaxation in lockdown restrictions, when parents may feel confident to send their children back to school again.

The Chair welcomed the Area Advisor from the DfE to comment on the EHE work. The Area Advisor emphasised how keen and interested the DfE department was on the findings of the research



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being undertaken in Sandwell and asked if it could be shared once completed. He advised that the Education Select Committee was currently taking evidence with regards to EHE where interesting points had been raised.

The Board noted that other Local Authorities had also raised questions around data collection and the powers of the local authorities if intervention was required and how to better support parents that were selecting to home educate their children. The DfE Area Advisor confirmed that the Select Committee would be taking more evidence early in 2021.

The Chair highlighted the importance of the DfE Area Advisor attending the Scrutiny Board meeting and that the DfE was engaged in the work that was being undertaken. He agreed that the Working Group report would be going to the Select Committee as evidence and would hopefully be considered.

Agreed:

- 1) That the Board note the update report and confirm that the Elective Home Education Working Group evidence would be submitted to the Education Select Committee on Elective Home Education for consideration.

The next meeting will take place on the 15 March 2021 at 5.00pm

(Meeting ended at 7.03 pm)

Democratic_Services@sandwell.gov.uk



Report to Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

15th March 2021

Subject:	Reset and Recovery Update
Director:	Executive Director of Children's Services Lesley Hagger
Contact Officer:	Executive Director of Children's Services Lesley Hagger lesley_hagger@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendation







- 1.1 That the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board consider and comment on the Reset and Recovery update.

2 Context and Key Issue

- 2.1 The Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board will receive a presentation which provides an up to date position on reset and recovery activity across children's services and education functions.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people	Recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic with our communities, stakeholders and partners will have a positive impact on all ambitions contained in the Vision.
	People live well and age well	
	Strong resilient communities	
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods	
	A strong and inclusive economy	
	A connected and accessible Sandwell	

Executive Director Children’s Services – Lesley Hagger



Report to Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Monday 15th March


Subject:	Examination - A level and GCSE moderating
Director:	Director of Education Chris Ward
Contact Officer:	Group Head - Education, Skills and Employment Andy Timmins andrew_timmins@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

1.1 That members note the information in this report and attached presentation.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 Members requested an update on the examination system to be operated in schools in Summer 2021.

	Best start in life for children and young people
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4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 The Prime Minister, announced on 4th January that schools and colleges would close from the 5th January and that primary schools, secondary schools and colleges across England would move to remote provision until at least the February half term. He added that it was therefore not possible or fair for all exams to go ahead this summer as normal and



that the education secretary would now work with Ofqual to put in place alternative arrangements.

- 4.2 A consultation was later published on 15th January to seek views on a range of proposals to maximise fairness and help young people progress to the next stage of their education or training. The consultation was open to views of students who were due to take their exams, their parents and carers, their teachers, school and college leaders and others who had an interest, including further and higher education providers, and employers. The consultation closed on 29th January.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Summary of decisions following the consultation (Taken from *Ofqual: Decisions on how GCSE, AS and A level grades will be determined in summer 2021* and the Direction from the Secretary of State for Education.)

Assessment and evidence

- Teachers must assess their students' performance, only on what content has been delivered to them by their teachers.
- Teachers should determine the grades as late in the academic year as is practicable (submission date 18 June).
- Schools and colleges should use a broad range of evidence across the taught content.
- Private candidates should work with a centre to provide evidence in line with the sort of evidence that other students will produce.
- Overall, it will be no easier or harder for a student to achieve a particular grade this year compared to previous years.

Support materials

- Exam boards will provide a package of support materials to include questions, mark schemes, data about how students typically performed in individual questions and exemplar materials, as well as advice for teachers about content coverage, topic selection, marking and making grading judgements. This will be based on past questions



and will include a proportion of previously unpublished questions for every subject.

- Use of these exam board support materials is not compulsory; they will be part of the range of evidence teachers could use to determine the grade.

Quality assurance

- Centres' internal QA arrangements will include consideration of the centre's profile of results in previous years.
- Exam boards will put in place arrangements for external QA to check each centre's internal QA process and, in a sample of centres, to review the evidence for one or more subjects. Sampling should be both random, and risk-based.

Appeals and results

- Students will be able to appeal their grade.
- A student who is unhappy with their grade will first ask their centre to check whether an administrative or procedural error had been made.
- Where a centre does not believe an error had been made, a student can ask the centre to appeal to the exam board on their behalf.
- Results days will be on 10 August for AS and A level, and 12 August for GCSE results.

Autumn exam series

- A full series of GCSE, AS and A level examinations will be held in the autumn.

Vocational, technical and other regulated qualifications

- Results for VTQs most similar to GCSEs, AS and A levels that are used for progression to further or higher education should be awarded using similar arrangements to these qualifications.
- Exams or assessments for VTQs used to enter directly into employment should continue where they are critical to demonstrate occupational or professional competence and can be delivered in line with public health measures.



- Exams and assessments for smaller qualifications taken for mixed purposes, such as Functional Skills Qualifications and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) should continue in line with public health measures, but with alternative arrangements available for those who cannot access the assessments.

6 Implications

Support for schools may be needed in the following areas:

- Ensuring that staff can access appropriate training, support and to help them to make teacher assessments.
- Identifying which evidence from pupils' work will be used as the basis for teacher assessments, in line with exam board guidance.
- Ensuring processes in place for quality assuring teacher assessments are robust.
- Facilitating opportunities for schools to moderate/quality assure samples of evidence supporting teacher assessments and to benchmark judgements.

Resources:	School Improvement Advisory Team support for schools.
Legal and Governance:	Compliance with the Direction from the Secretary of State for Education under S 129(6) of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.
Risk:	Centres could become subject to a malpractice investigation if they do not comply fully with regulations. To mitigate against this, they should ensure that they have robust quality assurance procedures in place, in line with awarding body requirements.
Equality:	As part of the consultation, Ofqual carried out an analysis of how arrangements could have a positive or negative impact on students because of their protected characteristics and how any negative impacts could be removed or mitigated. This was undertaken in line with the public sector equality duty in section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010.



Health and Wellbeing:	The proposals are designed to give students confidence that their awarded grades will reflect the standard at which they are performing based on what they have been taught.
Social Value	The proposals are intended to enable young people to progress fairly to further education, training and employment, taking account of the disruption to their studies caused by COVID 19.

7. Appendices

- Ofqual: Consultation on how GCSE, AS and A level grades should be awarded in summer 2021 (No longer online, but a PDF copy is available if required)

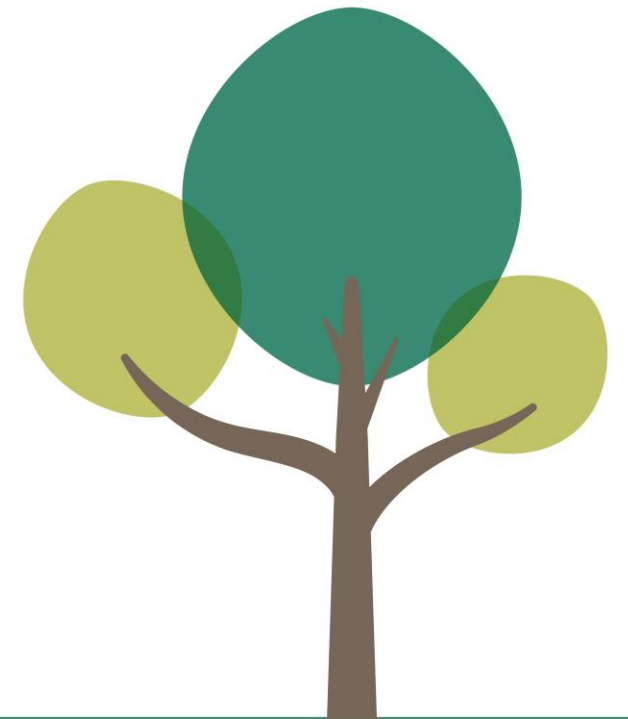
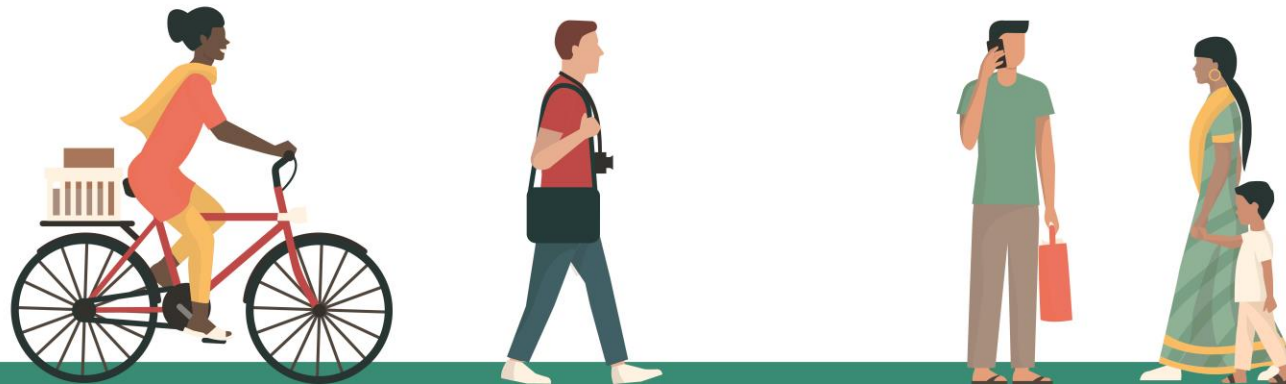
8. Background Papers

- [Direction from the Secretary of State for Education to Ofqual's Chief Regulator about how GCSE, AS, A level and vocational and technical qualifications should be awarded in 2021.](#)
- [Ofqual: Decisions on how GCSE, AS and A level grades will be determined in summer 2021](#)
- [DfE: Awarding qualifications in summer 2021](#)



Public Examinations

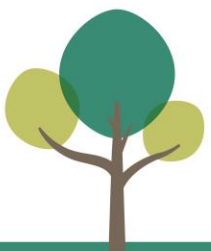
Summer 2021



GCSE, AS and A level proposals

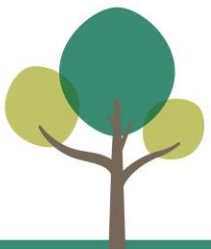
Recent communications

- Students are given the opportunity to demonstrate the standard at which they can perform
- Provide an incentive them to continue learning throughout the rest of the academic year
- Teachers being asked to assess their students' performance to determine their qualification grade
- Ensuring this task is as manageable as possible by resources and expertise to achieve this



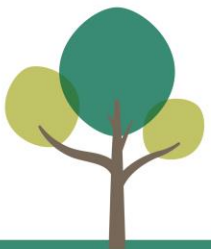
GCSE, AS and A level consultation: decisions

- Assessment and evidence
- Support materials
- Quality assurance
- Appeals and results
- Autumn exam series
- Vocational, technical and other regulated qualifications



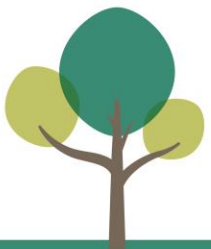
GCSE, AS and A level grading 2021: challenges

- A student's grade in each subject will be based on their teachers' assessment of the standard at which the student is performing. So students who have missed more school may be less advanced in their learning and academic development and thus be liable to be awarded lower grades.
- The expectation is that students will have been taught sufficient content to allow progression to the next stage of their education. Heads of centres will have to confirm this.



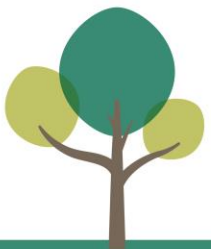
GCSE, AS and A level grading 2021: challenges

- The suitability and relevance of the exam board produced assessments and the relative importance of these in relation to other evidence
- Identifying which evidence from pupils' work will be used as the basis for teacher assessments, in line with exam board guidance
- Making sure that the evidence base for teacher assessments is as consistent as possible for all students in a subject



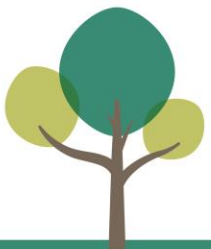
GCSE, AS and A level grading 2021: challenges

- Ensuring that that quality assurance processes are rigorous and robust to mitigate against any allegations of malpractice
- Ensuring schools that have recently improved can still demonstrate this via their results
- Managing teacher workload

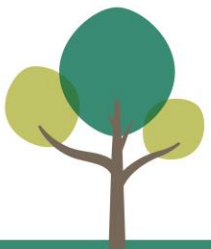


GCSE, AS and A level grading 2021: support for schools

- Support and guidance with accessing appropriate training to help with making teacher assessments
- Facilitating support with moderation and quality assurance of samples of evidence and teacher assessments
- Support for subject leaders and heads of department
- Support with data analysis and benchmarking teacher assessed grades



Questions...



Report to Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board

15 March 2021

Subject:	Recommissioning of Children’s Centres
Director:	Executive Director of Children’s Services Lesley Hagger lesley_hagger@sandwell.gov.uk
Contact Officer:	Senior Commissioning Manager Peter Forth, peter_forth@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Children’s Services and Education Scrutiny Board consider and comment on the proposal for Recommissioning of Children’s Centres as detailed in Appendix A attached (below).



2. Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The current commissioning arrangements for children’s centres end on 31 March 2022. The proposal will be considered at Cabinet on 17 March 2021, approval would enable the recommissioning process to be completed during 2021 so that the successful bidder is in place for 1 April 2022. This in turn will ensure a smooth transition between agencies where necessary and a resultant consistency of service provision.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people
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	<p>Children’s Centres provide a central point for the local delivery of elements of this objective within each of the towns in the borough.</p> <p>Centres are well established to be able to provide early help and support to families on a range of issues. They offer family support services including parenting courses and services promoting early language in young children.</p>
	<p>People live well and age well</p> <p>Centres work in conjunction with local maternity and health visiting services to provide antenatal education courses, baby clinics and development checks.</p> <p>In offering the range of services centres help families to live well whether this is providing access to welfare advice, practical support from early years practitioners or just a listening ear.</p>
	<p>Strong resilient communities</p> <p>Children’s Centres provide support for families within their local community. This process brings families together for mutual support and encourages parents to become volunteers with the service.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 Core centres

4.2 In Sandwell there are seven core children’s centres in the borough with one based in each town and two in the West Bromwich area. The core centres provide the main base for staffing as well as providing facilities to run sessions and groups for families.



4.3 Summary of core centres

Name of centre	Address
Burnt Tree Children's Centre	20-25 Tividale Street, Burnt Tree DY4 7SD
Cape Hill Children's Centre	Corbett Street, Smethwick B66 3PX
Rowley Springfield Children's Centre	Dudley Road, Rowley Regis B65 8JY
Tipton Children's Centre	Glebefields Library, 24 Ridgeway Road, Tipton DY4 0TB
Friar Park Children's Centre	Priory Primary School, Dorsett Road, Wednesbury WS10 0JG
Hillside Children's Centre	Connor Road, West Bromwich, B71 3DJ
Greets Green Children's Centre	Ryders Green School, Claypit Lane, West Bromwich B70 9EZ

4.4 Services provided by core centres

- Information, advice and guidance about services to local families
- Antenatal education and support
- Early Years services
- Play, Talk, Read project to promote home learning by parents with young children
- Wellcomm speech and language screening
- SEND support to families as appropriate
- Family Support including welfare rights support delivered through Sandwell Consortium
- Providing access to health services by jointly working with midwifery and health visiting to provide baby clinics and development checks
- Providing the initial steps towards further education, employment and training for parents
- Childcare on site (in 6/7 core centres) operated by third parties.



- 4.5 **Covid 19** - During the Covid 19 pandemic children's centres were able to maintain their contact and support to the most vulnerable families, for example those who are subject to Early Help plans. Centres have adapted their approach to the delivery of parenting courses, antenatal education groups, etc to provide these virtually. This approach has brought some unexpected successes including the greater number of fathers engaging in some courses. It is expected as we move forwards that the centres will adapt again and offer a mixed programme of actual sessions and those delivered virtually.
- 4.6 Unfortunately it has to be acknowledged that the pandemic has had a negative impact on families with young children. There are, for example, high numbers of families not currently taking up the two and three years old places for their children. Centres (and other providers) have not been able to run play sessions for young children and their parents/carers so the opportunity for children to socialise and learn through play are accordingly reduced. The lack of contact also raises concerns that there may be issues with children that are not being identified.
- 4.7 Children's centres will have short-term plans to recommence play sessions, identify those children in need of additional support and to proactively encourage parents to utilise existing childcare places. The centres will also be a part of the wider strategy for offering additional support to children and families. This is likely to include additional focussed sessions and even greater emphasis on reaching out to all children in the borough along with different partner agencies.
- 4.8 The core centres are grouped together in lots as detailed below in 4.11 to reduce management and administration costs.
- 4.9 There are other centres in the borough which are largely focussed on providing childcare places. These are operated by a range of agencies including schools, voluntary and private sector providers. These are largely self-sustaining.

4.10 **Tender**



Anticipated tender timeline

May 2021	Preparation of tender documentation
September 2021	Tender advertised
October 2021	Deadline for submissions
November 2021	Evaluation of tenders
December 2021	Award of contract
January 2022	Transition/operational issues
1 April 2022	Successful agencies commence new contracts

4.11 Tender lots

There will be 3 lots in the tender based on the current administrative arrangements as listed below

A	Oldbury & Smethwick
B	Rowley & Tipton
C	Wednesbury & West Bromwich

Agencies will be able to bid for 1, 2 or 3 of the lots. Each bid for each lot will be evaluated individually.

4.12 Interest in tender

It is anticipated that there will be interest from a range of national and local voluntary sector providers. Many of the agencies have operated children's centres in the borough previously through previous tender processes.

4.13 Scrutiny involvement

The matter was considered by Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board on 15 March 2021. Feedback will be tabled on the day of the Cabinet meeting.

4.14 Parents' views



Sandwell Early Years Transformation Academy undertook consultation in late 2020/early 2021 with local parents about their experience of bringing up children in Sandwell. That exercise highlighted a number of key issues which the children’s centres need to address as part of the future delivery. Details of the issues and actions to be taken are listed in Appendix A.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 **Extension of contracts.** There is no option to further extend existing contracts as the current contracts expire on 31 March 2022.
- 5.2 **Shorten the length of contracts offered to two years.** It would be possible to go out to tender based on a shorter contract period eg two years. This would allow the matter to be reconsidered again in two years’ time. This course of action however is likely to have a negative impact on the number of agencies bidding for the contracts and have an impact on staff retention as they look for more permanent positions.
- 5.3 **Bring the service in-house.** An alternative solution would be to bring the operation of core children’s centres into the local authority. This would require substantial input on a range of legal, financial and human resources issues. The TUPE transfer of existing staff that meet the TUPE requirements into the local authority would be a major undertaking.

6 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>Revenue funding. The maximum amount of revenue funding for the operation of the centres would be £3,194,920 per annum.</p> <p>The budget allocation for each town will be detailed in the tender documents and will be based primarily on the numbers of children in the respective towns. Agencies will make bids based on the maximum figure.</p>
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	<p>Contract value The maximum contract value over 4 years would be £12,779,680.</p> <p>Staffing The staff of centres are employed primarily by the current lead agencies of the service. Where applicable those staff will have TUPE rights of transfer to the successful bidder organisation. These are issues that would be resolved between the existing employer and the successful agency.</p> <p>Leases A standard lease will form part of the tender pack. Successful agencies would need to agree to those leases as part of the application process. Where there has been no change of lead agency existing leases may be able to be extended.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>Section 5A of the Childcare Act 2006 states that local authorities must make arrangements, as far as practicable, for 'sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local needs'.</p> <p>The proposals in this report do not conflict with that duty.</p> <p>As the maximum contract value for 4 years would equate to £12,779,680, it would be caught by the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The tender would therefore need to be procured, and the contract would need to be awarded, in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. In addition to this, compliance with the Council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules would need to be ensured.</p>



<p>Risk:</p>	<p>The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) has been complied with – to identify and assess the significant risks associated with this decision / project. This includes (but is not limited to) political, legislation, financial, environmental and reputation risks. Based on the information provided, it is the officers’ opinion that no significant risks have been identified.</p> <p>Funding There is a risk committing to the funding of the contract for 3-4 years when there is uncertainty about future government funding settlements beyond the first two years. To mitigate that risk flexibility will be included in the tender and contract documents to reduce the budget if necessary.</p> <p>Figures for funding in future years will be subject to change and confirmation.</p> <p>Bids There is always a risk that there will be a limited number of agencies coming forward to bid but given the involvement of a number of agencies previously the risk is seen to be very low. Agencies will be duly notified when the tender is released.</p> <p>Failure to gain Cabinet approval. If the report is not approved as scheduled it will negatively impact on the timescales for completion of the tender process. That in turn could lead to problems with the transition process between providers.</p>
<p>Equality:</p>	<p>An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) initial screening has been undertaken. The screening identified that there will be no adverse impact on people or groups with protected characteristics. The proposal will seek to maintain the current arrangements for the delivery of consistent services across the borough. A full EIA is not therefore required.</p>



Health and Wellbeing:	Centres provide a local facility to access a range of services, including health services for young children.
Social Value	<p>Providers seek to enhance the community aspect of children’s centres and to offer services at other venues to reach out to different communities.</p> <p>Centres have a good record of recruiting staff locally and there has been a steady flow of parents developing their knowledge and skills so that they have been able to take up posts within the service.</p>

7. Appendices

Appendix A Parents feedback and implications.

8. Background Papers

8.1 None



Appendix A

Consultation with parents

In the Early Years Transformation Academy (EYTA) report of consultation with parents that took place late 2020/early 2021 there were both specific references to children's centres and pointers for the way that parents would want to see future services developed. Some of the headline issues are noted below.

1. Support

- 84% of parents state that they would go to their family in the first instance 'especially mum' if they have a problem.
- If the problem was medical parents spoke about talking to their GP (62%) and their Health Visitor (46%). If it was about learning or child development 30% of respondents said that they would use their local children's centre.
- As one parent stated: "I will come to the children's centre first because I have been coming for a long time and staff have supported me so much".

Action

Further raise awareness of children's centres for advice and support for all families especially those without local support structures.

2. Parents listed a range of **different services in the community** that they use which is encouraging. Childrens centres were mentioned the most frequently especially in relation to attending baby clinics, play sessions and parenting courses.

Although the children's centres were mentioned frequently they were not mentioned by the majority of parents.

Action

Further work needs to be undertaken to proactively raise awareness of children's centres and their services in each town and duly monitor the effectiveness of the actions taken.



Links with other local services need to be further enhanced so that parents are fully aware of the options available and that services work in tandem to mutual benefit as part of the overarching Early Help strategy.

3. In terms of **services that parents would want to see developed** there were a couple of key threads. One was about availability in terms of providing more local, free or low-cost services at the weekend and in the evenings. The second thread was about parents wanting to work together for mutual support and enhancing the sense of community.

“Groups run by other parents not professionals. Somewhere where parents can go to chat without judgement,”

81% of parents stated that they are often approached by other parents for help and support.

Action

Centres to be more available for the delivery of services directly and/or indirectly in the evenings and at weekends.

Centres to work with local parents and grandparents to establish informal, self-help services operated by parents themselves. These groups would provide good avenues to cascade information and advice on a range of pertinent issues in the community.

4. Parents noted that they had **highs and lows** in the week as they juggled family life.

“Low times are when I’m overloaded as I work part-time then I have things to do with the children, housework and other chores. I feel overwhelmed. The high point is when I have free time and I can plan activities with the children and I don’t have other pressures.”

“My high times as a parent is having quality time with my children. I enjoy coming home from work to them so I can see what they have been



up to and have that interaction with them. My lows are before bedtime when they are tired, cranky and unsettled. Everything just seems harder to do.”

Action

To look at running further informal, short sessions for parents about tackling such issues as routines, bedtimes, getting ready for school. This could be undertaken as part of the mutual support offer noted in an earlier point.

5. Aspirations

Every parent highlighted that they wanted the best for their children and would support them as much as possible to achieve that objective. Although some parents had specific goals for their children the majority stated that they their children to be healthy and happy.

“I hope they all grow up to be good kids and have a good education. I want them to be happy and be good people. I want them to be part of the community and have fun!”

Action:

Centres to maximise parents’ aspirations in how they promote the importance of activities and specific initiatives for example play, talk, read. To further foster the community approach to the delivery of services.

6. Preparation for school

Parents talked about taking their child to playgroup or nursery so that they can interact with other children; teaching them independence skills eg doing up buttons, potty training. Others recognised the importance of reading to their child and singing nursery rhymes.



“Bring learning into everything that you do as part of your everyday routines and tasks eg cooking, gardening and even doing the washing up!!

Other parents perceived preparation for school as more focussed on the practical aspects eg buying a school uniform during the weeks before commencing,

“Buy them uniform to make them feel part of the school, talk about the school and their worries.”

Action

To proactively engage parents of children under 3 years in Play, Talk, Read projects. This will encourage parents to appreciate the importance of readiness for school commencing at the earliest point.



Report to Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

15th March 2021

Subject:	Holiday Activities and Food Scheme
Director:	Executive Director of Children's Services Lesley Hagger lesley_hagger@sandwell.gov.uk
Contact Officer:	Play Strategy Manager Samantha Harman samantha_harman@sandwell.gov.uk


1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Scrutiny Board receives the presentation regarding Sandwell's submission to the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) scheme.
- 1.2 That the Scrutiny Board receives a further report in the autumn, following the completion of the Easter and Summer HAF programmes.






2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Sandwell's HAF plans have been submitted for government approval.
- 2.2 The Scrutiny Board has an important role to play in monitoring the success and impact of the scheme in Sandwell.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>Best start in life for children and young people</p> <p>The HAF scheme will provide children with opportunities to catch up on lost learning, improve their understanding of</p>
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	healthy lifestyles, and spend important time with their peers during the school holidays.
	<p>People live well and age well</p> <p>The involvement of families in healthy food and nutrition activities, as part of the HAF scheme, will support families to live well.</p>
	<p>Strong resilient communities</p> <p>The community-based approach to the HAF scheme will enhance the resilience of children, families and neighbourhoods.</p>
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods
	<p>A strong and inclusive economy</p> <p>Using local providers will reinforce Sandwell's ambitions for community wealth building.</p>
	A connected and accessible Sandwell

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) scheme, has provided healthy food and enriching activities to disadvantaged children in some local authority areas since 2018 via a DfE grant bidding system. It will be expanded across England this year.
- 4.2 The aim of the scheme is to make free holiday activities places available to children eligible for free school meals for the equivalent of at least four hours a day, four days a week and for six weeks a year. This would cover four weeks in the summer and a week's worth of provision in each of the Easter and Christmas holidays in 2021. There are approximately 17,000 children in receipt of free school meals in Sandwell – this has increased by 19% during the Covid pandemic. The scheme can be made available to a wider group of children who would pay for the provision.



4.2 The ambition for children participating in the scheme is as follows:

- a. To eat more healthily over the school holidays;
- b. To be more active during the school holidays;
- c. To take part in engaging and enriching activities which support the development of resilience, character and well-being, along with their wider educational attainment;
- d. To be safe and not to be socially isolated;
- e. To have greater knowledge of health nutrition; and
- f. To be more engaged with school and other local services.

4.3 The full guidance is attached at Appendix A, but the key elements of the role of coordinating holiday provision involves:

- mapping the holiday provision in the local area to ensure that holiday provision exists and is supporting the areas of greatest need;
- establishing a steering group to support implementation and delivery that should include representatives from a wide range of local bodies, including local police and other uniform services, local public health officials, school leaders, youth services, social services, charities and the voluntary sector;
- drawing in wider support to enhance the local programme, for example bringing in funding from other sources such as philanthropists, sponsors, food providers as well as supermarkets and local businesses providing these organisations fit with the values and aspirations of the programme;
- developing a local plan for provision in the local area, based on what is known about local supply and demand;
- ensuring that sufficient, adequate provision is available across the local area for children with SEND/additional needs;
- awarding funding to holiday club providers in order to ensure there is enough provision to meet demand;



- supporting all providers to meet the DfE framework of standards (including safeguarding requirements and meals that meet school food standards) and to improve the quality of their provision;
- working with families to reduce dependency by providing nutritional education for children and educating families around purchasing and preparing healthy meals on a sustainable basis;
- promoting and advertising provision, including working with local schools and other agencies to encourage the most at need children to attend;
- working with other local services or agencies to ensure a joined-up and efficient approach (e.g. signposting, sharing resources); and
- building local partnerships and sharing learning and good practice among local partners.

4.4 Sandwell has been awarded a grant of £1,932,480 for the period of the scheme (to end of school Xmas holidays 2021/2). The grant determination letter and guidance were issued on Sunday 7th February 2021 with a requirement to submit a delivery report to the DfE on 19th February relating to Easter activity. A multi-agency Steering Group has been established and a submission made for consideration by DfE. At the time of writing this report a response has not yet been received from DfE and so a presentation will be made at the Scrutiny Board meeting which will provide the most up to date position regarding delivery plans.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 A range of options have been considered for the delivery of the HAF scheme and these will be described in the presentation to the Scrutiny Board at its meeting.

6 Implications

Resources:	Financial, staffing, land/building implications
Legal and Governance:	Legal implications including regulations/law under which proposals are required/permitted and constitutional provisions



Risk:	Risk implications, including any mitigating measures planned/taken, health and safety, insurance implications
Equality:	Implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty, equality impact assessments
Health and Wellbeing:	Implications of the proposals on health and wellbeing of our communities
Social Value	Implications for social value and how the proposals are meeting this (for e.g. employment of local traders, young people)

7. Appendices

7.1 HAF guidance document – Appendix A

8. Background Papers

8.1 None

