

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel was held on 27 July 2020.

**PRESENT:** Councillors J Platt (Chair), L Garvey, A Hellaoui, T Higgins, S Hill, M Nugent, P Storey, G Wilson and D Jones (as Substitute)

**PRESENT AS OBSERVERS:** Councillor M Saunders

**OFFICERS:** C Breheny, R Brown, S Butcher, S Davidson, J McNally and G Moore

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** Councillor C Dodds.

**DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members at this point in the meeting.¤

20/1 **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

20/2 **MINUTES - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL - 17 FEBRUARY 2020**

The minutes of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting, held on 17 February 2020, were submitted and approved as a correct record.

20/3 **MINUTES - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL - 23 MARCH 2020**

The minutes of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting, held on 23 March 2020, were submitted and approved as a correct record.

20/4 **EDUCATION AND LEARNING - AN OVERVIEW**

The Director of Children's Services; the Director of Education, Prevention and Partnerships and the Strategic Lead for Education were in attendance to provide the scrutiny panel with an overview of the main service areas within its remit and an outline of priorities, key issues and challenges for the year ahead.

The Director of Education, Prevention and Partnerships made reference to an informal meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel that had been held on 26 June 2020. The purpose of the meeting had been to facilitate an informal discussion, centred on the delivery of education during the current Covid-19 crisis. It was commented that the Coronavirus pandemic had impacted greatly on the children and young people of Middlesbrough.

Within the Education remit, the Director explained that there were schools (both primary and secondary), some of which were maintained schools managed by the Local Authority and others that were academies managed by academy trusts. There were also educational settings for early years, post-16 and those pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

It was explained that there were various teams within Education:

- The work of the Strategic Lead for Education covered primary and secondary schools and early years provision, such as children's centres and nurseries.
- The work of the Head of Access to Education covered areas such as children missing from education and admissions.
- The work of the Strategic Lead for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) covered vulnerable learners.

It was commented that in 2017, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) had conducted a joint inspection of the local area of Middlesbrough to judge the effectiveness of the area in supporting those with SEND. The inspection identified a number of areas that required improvement and the local area was required to produce and submit a Written Statement of Action. Subsequently, the area had been re-inspected and it was acknowledged that the area had improved significantly.

In summary, the department provided an interface between the Local Authority and educational establishments. The department worked in partnership with head teachers. The teams within Education also provided a valuable link to the Local Authority's social workers.

During the Covid crisis, the Local Authority had maintained regular communication with all schools. Prior to the school holidays, despite lockdown, schools had continued to provide essential care for key worker families, and pupils classed as vulnerable.

The department continued to work with schools to assist with Covid recovery planning and transition support for schools returning in September. From September onwards the department planned to work with schools to tackle the impact of lost teaching time and secure funding to enable schools to undertake additional work to help students to catch up.

The scrutiny panel was also informed that community/adult learning also fell within the remit of the department, focusing on areas such as apprenticeships, routes to work and the Youth Employment Initiative.

In response to a Member's query regarding the safety of pupils travelling to the new school, Outwood Academy Riverside, the Director of Education explained that the department was working with Outwood Academy Trust to ensure that the route from the bus station to the school was as smooth as possible. Work was currently being undertaken to establish whether a route planner could be developed, to provide directions to pupils and facilitate the use of pedestrian crossings.

The Strategic Lead for Education commented that work had been undertaken by the department to assist head teachers with logistics to enable pupils to return to school, such as putting plans and risk assessments in place. In September, the department planned to provide support in respect of the curriculum and mental health and wellbeing.

The Director of Children's Services commented that a substantial amount of work had been undertaken to ensure that all services that operated within the Children's Services directorate worked collectively. It was added that work would continue to ensure that Children's Services offered seamless support to children and young people.

One of the concerns highlighted during the Coronavirus pandemic had been the need to support vulnerable children back into school, which would include working with foster carers and possibly residential units. It had become apparent that there was a need to further develop relationships between schools and social workers. It was commented that due to current caseload demands on social workers, schools had experienced difficulties in contacting social workers. The importance of social workers developing meaningful and supportive relationships with schools was highlighted. From September, meetings between the Director of Children's Services and head teachers would be scheduled on a weekly basis to ensure relationships between schools and social workers improved. Those meetings planned to provide schools with reassurance that issues/concerns would be dealt with swiftly, efficiently and effectively as possible.

The scrutiny panel was advised that in September, when the schools return, a spike in referrals to social care was expected. Therefore, it was predicted that relationships with schools would be particularly important, over the coming months.

In response to a Member's query, the Director of Children Services commented that if a child was placed outside of the Middlesbrough area, it would be likely that the child would change schools. The department would seek to keep children who were looked-after in their own schools but obviously there would be certain factors that would need to be considered when

making that decision, such as travel times to and from school. A subsequent query was raised regarding those children and young people placed in secure residential units. The Director explained that for secure units, there was education provision on-site.

A Member commented that it would be beneficial for the Director of Children's Services to attend the governor briefing for Middlesbrough schools. The Director of Education advised that the department was already planning to put those arrangements in place for the new school year.

Given that the casework demands for social workers were already high, a Member queried whether there would be a sufficient number of social workers to deal with the predicted spike of referrals in September. The Director of Children's Services advised that the issue that required consideration was whether the schools would be able to get in touch with social workers to seek advice and guidance. It was added that demand in children's social care was a big issue and the Improvement Board was scheduled to meet to discuss coping with demand and actions required to address the situation.

A Member commented on the importance of addressing any gaps between services and the benefits of offering a joined-up approach to supporting children and young people.

#### **AGREED**

**That the information presented be noted and taken into consideration when agreeing the scrutiny panel's work programme for 2020/21.**

20/5

#### **SETTING THE SCRUTINY PANEL'S WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21**

The Democratic Services Officer advised that the purpose of the item was to invite the scrutiny panel to consider its work programme for 2020/21.

Information and views had been obtained from a number of sources and a list of topics, which were anticipated to be of particular interest to the scrutiny panel, were detailed in the submitted report.

Members were advised that the topic of 'Addressing Poverty Issues and the Impact on Learning' had been carried over from last year, and it was envisaged that the scrutiny panel would receive its final evidence, in respect of that review, in September.

The submitted report proposed topical issues for the scrutiny panel's consideration, such as:

- tackling the impact of lost teaching time due to the Coronavirus Pandemic;
- using digital technology to improve learning;
- behaviour, discipline and bullying in schools;
- support for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities;
- improving social and emotional learning in primary schools;
- keeping children safe in education;
- pupil premium: effective use and accountability; and
- promoting the education of looked after children.

Members were advised that school place planning had been suggested by the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel as part of its review of Infrastructure Delivery.

The scrutiny panel was also informed that a Councillor had proposed several topics, including:

- provision for children with additional needs;
- how was funding affecting the ability of schools to provide effective learning and resources?;
- what was being done to help students 'catch up' on learning they had missed during the pandemic - how would that missed learning affect life outcomes?; and
- could children who had done better with remote and virtual learning, rather than

in-school learning, be supported in continuing remote and virtual learning, where possible?

Members were advised that the topics outlined were merely suggestions and the content of the scrutiny panel's work programme was entirely a decision for the scrutiny panel to make.

An aid had been attached at Appendix 1 of the submitted report to assist Members in prioritising issues where scrutiny could make an impact, add value or contribute to policy development.

It was recommended that the scrutiny panel identified two topics it would like to include in its work programme. It was commented that those topics would then submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for approval.

A Member commented that when discussing the work programme, it was important for the scrutiny panel to select those topics whereby scrutiny could have the biggest impact on the largest number of children and young people.

A Member proposed the topic of 'behaviour, discipline and bullying in schools'. In considering topics that could have the greatest impact, the Member made reference to a comment made by Ofsted's Director of Corporate Strategy, stating that "disruptive behaviour and bullying is the number one concern for parents when they look through school inspection reports". Another Member endorsed the proposal to review the topic and commented on the importance of receiving evidence from the academy trusts.

A Member commented on the importance of supporting looked-after children to achieve in education.

A Member expressed an interest in tackling the educational attainment gap in schools and raising the attainment of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A Member commented on the importance of tackling the impact of lost teaching time due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

The Director for Education, Prevention and Partnerships commented that the recovery plans responding to the pandemic covered many areas discussed by Members, for example, the requirement to help accelerate the academic progress of those from disadvantaged backgrounds and prevent the gap between them and their more affluent peers widening. It was commented that transition points were a critical aspect of many areas that impacted on children and young people.

A discussion ensued and it was agreed that the Corporate Parenting Board would receive updates/information on the academic progress of looked-after children and on the key role of the Virtual School in ensuring that looked-after children had the maximum opportunity to reach their full educational potential. It was also agreed that the findings of the Corporate Parenting Board would be fed back to the scrutiny panel.

The Director of Children's Services advised that the scrutiny panel may wish to consider a mixture of working styles in its programme, including Members undertaking visits and research and reporting their findings back to the scrutiny panel and Children's Services. A Member commented that conducting investigations in that way had secured positive impacts for scrutiny in the past. The scrutiny panel had previously visited schools, establishing positive and productive working relationships with staff and students, to obtain evidence in respect of previous reviews.

A Member expressed concern regarding the cost of school uniforms and suggested that it would be interesting if Members obtained information from parents on the costs they had incurred.

In light of the issues discussed, the Democratic Services Officer confirmed the topics that had been agreed.

**AGREED**

**That the topics listed below be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for approval and inclusion in the work programme of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel for 2020/2021:**

**In-depth reviews**

- **Behaviour, discipline and bullying in schools; and**
- **The impact of Covid-19 and the attainment gap.**

**Task and finish group**

- **The cost of school uniforms.**

20/6

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - AN UPDATE**

The Chair advised that:

- On 21 May 2020, the Overview and Scrutiny Board had considered the draft COVID-19 Recovery Plan and an update from Children's Services.
- On 11 June, the Board had considered an update on the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan, an update from the Executive Member for Environment and an update on COVID-19 recovery plans for Environment and Infrastructure.
- On 2 July, the Board had considered an update from the Mayor; the Covid-19 - Response, Recovery and Local Outbreak Plans and a Covid-19 Update on Health, Adult Social Care and Public Health.

**NOTED**

20/7

**PROPOSED MEETING SCHEDULE FOR 2020/21**

A proposed meeting schedule, for the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel, was submitted for the scrutiny panel's consideration.

**AGREED**

**That the proposed meeting schedule, for 2020/21, be approved.**

20/8

**RESIGNATION OF THE CHAIR AND APPOINTMENT OF NEW CHAIR FOR 2020/21**

The Chair advised that, due to other commitments, he wished to resign as the Chair and as a member of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel.

In light of the Chair's resignation, nominations were sought for the appointment of Chair of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel for 2020/21.

Councillor Hill was nominated and seconded and, following a vote, appointed as Chair of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel.

**AGREED**

**That Councillor Hill be appointed as Chair of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel.**

20/9

**ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.****Family and Friends Care (Kinship Care)**

In referencing the minutes of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel meeting, held on 17 February 2020, a Member requested further information on the review of Family and Friends Care that was undertaken in 2017. The Democratic Services Officer commented that the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel had received an update in respect of the review and that information would be circulated to Members.