

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 30 January 2020 at 6.00 pm in Meeting Room G3-G4, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford

Present: Councillors M Boylan, I T W Fletcher, E J Greenaway, V J Holt, J Jones, A D McClements (Chair) and G L Offland.
Co-optees: S Fikeis and L Fowler

Also Present: Councillor S A W Reynolds (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Education)

In Attendance: S Bass (Commissioning, Procurement and Brokerage), J Eatough (Director for Governance), H Loveridge (Director for Education and Skills), D Moseley (Democratic & Scrutiny Services Team Leader), K Robinson (Democratic & Scrutiny Services Officer), L Smith (School Performance and Development), and S Wellman (SEND 0-25)

Apologies: Councillors C Morgan, K T Tomlinson and M Ward

1 Declarations of Interest

None.

2 Minutes of the Last Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

3 Travel Assistance Policy and Transport Review Consultation

Members received an overview of the Council's proposed travel assistance policies and its transport review consultation. Officers described the consultation process and informed the Members of the consultation timetable. The Commissioning, Procurement & Brokerage Service Delivery Manager set out the rationale behind timetabling of the two consultations; explaining the split of school and post-16 SEND. Both phases of the consultation were to follow the same process with the addition of an 'easy read' version of the consultation for the second phase. The 'easy read' version was aimed specifically at My Options clients.

The Commissioning, Procurement & Brokerage Service Delivery Manager subsequently laid out the next steps for the policies once the consultation had closed. Feedback for both phases would be unified and considered together to create a single proposal to present to Cabinet in the spring.

Members asked a number of questions as follows:-

Page 9 of the policy, stated that the cut-off date for applications for the new school year was 30 June. With there being a lot of movement into the area thanks to new housing developments, how would the policy work for new movers?

This date was for the existing around 1,500 children in the area and if their applications were received on time, their eligibility could be checked and a place on the routes could be sourced in time for the start of the new school year in September. After that deadline, no guarantee to get transport in place could be made although efforts would be made to provide transport assistance.

What about children who move in year? What was the process?

Applications were accepted throughout the year outside of the normal admissions round but it was acknowledged that this could be better clarified in the policy.

The new policy specifically removed the application of assistance, for parents who opted to send their children to faith schools. Had the Council considered the effect of the policy on the attendance at faith schools and the anticipated reduction in cost to transport provision?

Parents were free to express a preference for any school but the local authority did not have to provide transport if it was not their nearest school. The Council had found that the policy to provide transport to faith schools was advantageous to a specific group of parents over and above others. However, the Council was still obliged to provide support to those on low income.

It was noted that discrimination regulations included religion as a protected characteristic.

There was nothing stopping parents applying to faith schools for a place for their child. A faith school was a preference, and one that they were entitled to, but the responsibility for transport remained with the parent.

It was noted that Holy Trinity Academy was the only secondary faith school in the area but it had a tight catchment area. It also allocated 60% of school places to faith applicants. How many children would be effected by this policy?

In common with other local faith schools, Holy Trinity Academy had a catchment area but was able to accept pupils residing out of that area. As a voluntary aided school it also had its own admissions policy. It was predicted that Holy Trinity Academy would soon see an increase in pupil numbers due to significant housing growth in the area and the bulge that had been seen over the last 5-7 years in primary schools moving through to the secondary schools. The Council would guarantee people who applied this year their places. But, going into next year it was not known how many people would apply.

Was it possible to make an estimate based on this and previous years?

The area had seen some of the greatest housing growth and it was expected that local applications would increase. Combined with the number of children moving through local primary schools it was expected that school numbers would increase significantly.

What happened if a child had a spare seat one year then there was not one available in the next year?

Unfortunately, spare seat would be lost. The parents would receive a full term's notice and would be offered support finding alternatives. The seats were necessary for those who met the criteria. Additionally, spare seats could be lost in circumstances where reductions in the number of eligible children requiring a seat result in the size of the vehicle required

Could you tell us more about independent travel training?

The Post-16 Offer was part of the Council's strategy to help with the transition to adulthood. There was a programme of independent travel training with the goal of helping those with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) to be able to use public transport. This was especially targeted at supporting the transition into college and independence.

How would the Council ensure children were adequately matched for taxi-share?

Taxi-share was a last resort but the Council worked closely with providers, providing training, and also had very good drivers. The Council would also work with schools and parents to ensure the children got along and there were no problems during the day. If children didn't work well together then a travel assistant could be put in place.

Where were the taxis licenced?

Taxis were licenced by Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire. There were robust contracts and regulations in place with the companies and drivers.

Recommended – that the final policy provides greater clarity regarding transport applications for in-year admissions.

4 Educational Attainment

The Director for Education and Skills gave a presentation on educational attainment in the Borough. The Director presented the latest educational attainment statistics to the Committee, the Director set out attainment across the Key Stages and contrasted this with the national average. The Director followed this up with an update on the Councils work to improve on the set of results presented, setting out the actions that had been taken. These included a round table held with key partners and a strategic partnership between head teachers and chief executives. The role of the Local Authority Quality Assurance Officer in monitoring school performance was also set out for the Committee.

Members asked a number of questions as follows:-

More than half of the Boroughs secondary schools were over the national average for 'Attainment 8'; was there any data on the ones that weren't so good, for example around the relationship with feeder primaries?

Some schools performed better in certain subject areas. Some schools had had a difficult time but were now seeing improvement. It was possible to say, with some confidence, that a number of secondary schools would get good results for the current year as considerable progress had been seen. Some schools had issues but were receiving support, sometimes from outside of the Borough.

What was the Council doing to support academies in the Borough?

Academies were outside the remit of the Council but if there were concerns. The Chief Executives of the academy trusts would be approached initially due to the good relationships that existed. If this was not effective the regional School Commissioner could be approached and asked if the school is receiving support, and if they were satisfied with the support they were receiving. The Council had a responsibility to all children of the Borough no matter which school they attended.

Are children with SEND identified early enough?

There were three SEND coordinators at the Council, together with a whole infrastructure around early support for SEND. Most individuals with a plan were identified at an early age. Ofsted, Three years ago, Ofsted rated the Council's SEND provision as good.

KS2 children were often very stressed about exams, then they moved on to high school and were re-examined to check their KS2 results. Did the Council have a role in alleviating the pressure children might feel? Has there been any discussion at national level about stopping KS2 exams or making any changes?

The Committee had been advised that on the contrary, the government were bringing in more testing at this level as opposed to taking them away. There was pressure on pupils but schools were encouraged to offer a broader curriculum with cultural capital such as encouraging music. Schools were still ultimately judged on performance and this was difficult. Heads were under pressure to get good results but equally many heads would say the most important thing was to offer a good education and opportunities that pupils wouldn't have otherwise. Many heads did not want children to feel the pressure that they do.

Did putting too much pressure on children have the opposite effect? There was a need to acknowledge the benefit of the cultural capital aspect of learning and give a broader education to children.

There was a need to find a way to meet all children's needs, including their varying learning speeds, and also find ways for each child to show off their talents and ability.

At KS2, there was a 2.3% reduction in the score for reading between 2018 and 2019, though 2018 was better than 2017. It was also noted that nationally these figures had gone down.

The rates were still above national level, locally, but it was a national trend that reading figures had decreased.

What actions had been taken to address this trend?

The schools where this had happened had been identified; some of them were 'good' schools so the decline had come as a surprise. There were special development conferences and a special reading initiative in place to address the issue.

What were staff retention levels in the Borough? How did the Service deal with teaching staff stress levels in schools?

Officers did not have this information. However, if the Council noted a particularly high staff turnover then it would investigate. Having said that, it was common for successful staff to move quickly through the ranks and leave to pursue higher roles.

There was concern that teachers were being put under pressure over results

It was noted that this was a government led pressure. Local Trade Unions had not directly expressed any concerns. There was always general pressure on teachers but there was not a sense that teachers were under undue pressure in Telford & Wrekin.

AGREED – that the Director for Education and Skills be requested to provide a finalised report on this topic.

5 Work Programme 2019/20 to 2020/21

AGREED – Members of the Committee agreed the Work Programme.

6 Chair's Update

The Chair noted that a timetable for future meetings was being worked on.

The meeting ended at 7.52 pm

Chairman:

Date: Thursday, 3 September 2020