

Minutes of: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 7 September 2021

Present: Councillor S Wright (in the Chair)
Councillors C Boles, S Butler, P Cropper, J Lancaster,
L McBriar, T Pilkington, D Quinn, G Staples-Jones and
M Whitby

Also in attendance: Cath Atherden – Service Manager Inclusion
Isobel Booler, Director of Education and Skills
Paul Cooke, Interim Assistant Director of Learning
Anne Coyle
Councillor Tamoor Tariq, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member
for Education and Skills

Public Attendance: No members of the public were present at the meeting.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor K Thomas, Dr Cathy Fines - NHS Bury CCG
Chair, Jane Case NHS Bury CCG, Peter Black –
Bury2Gether, Rhiannon Walton – Bury2Gether

A pre meeting training session was provided to all Committee Members at 5.30pm. The session provided Members with an overview of the Inspection of Local Authority Children Services (ILACS)

CYPSC.1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Whitby declared a personal interest as Chair of the Audit Committee in relation to the Audit Committee receiving reports and updates referencing Project Safety Valve and the Designated Schools Grant.

Councillor Boles declared a personal interest as he was employed by a Bolton school which also has a site in Bury.

Councillor Staple Jones declared a personal interest as a Governor of Bury Church High School.

Councillor Wright declared a personal interest as his wife is employed at a school in Bury.

Councillor Pilkington declared a personal interest as a parent of a child with special educational needs who attends a school in Bury.

CYPSC.2 PUBLIC QUESTIONS TIME

There were no members of the public present to ask questions.

CYPSC.3 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Members questions.

CYPSC.4 MEETING THEME - SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVISION WITHIN THE BOROUGH

Councillor Tamoor Tariq, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills thanked the Committee for his invitation to attend and introduced Isobel Booler, Director of Education and Skills, Paul Cooke, Strategic Lead, Educational Services.

Councillor Tariq presented a report which provided the Committee with an update on Bury's progress on embedding the special educational needs and disability (SEND) reforms set out in the Children and Families Act 2014 including the progress against the Written Statement of Action.

It was reported that in terms of SEND Bury were not where they wanted to be. It was explained that the Council were working closely with Bury Together and the CCG in relation to SEND reform and co-production and the relationship with these partners was very important.

The Council was inspected as a local area in 2017 with a follow up visit in 2019 and both visits had found that Bury had not been effective in its implementation of the SEND reforms.

Following the 2017 inspection a 'written statement of action' was produced setting out how the Council and CCG together with partners and stakeholders would respond to the recommendations arising from the inspection.

A SEND assurance Board has been established in partnership with Bury2Gether parents' group and is chaired by the Director of Education and Skills. Members of the Board are at director level from children's social care, education, early help, health commissioning and clinical leads, together with representatives from Bury2Gether and Bury's Parent Carer Forum. The Board reports into the Children's Strategic Partnership Board and links with the Health Charter Groups through the Deputy Director of Commissioning and the clinical lead from the CCG, who sit on both Boards.

Good progress has been achieved against the each of the priorities in the written statement of action however there is a need to ensure a shared strategic vision across all partner agencies to deliver SEND transformation in co-production with parents and carers through a Local Strategic Action Plan.

Isobel Booler introduced herself to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Those present were given the opportunity to ask questions in relation to the information provided and the following points were raised:

- Councillor Lancaster referred to Project Safety Valve and asked how and when the delivery of this would be measured.

It was explained that a lot of work had been going on to ensure that the governance structure was right and that the correct people were in place within the project delivery board and the project work streams. Recruitment

had been undertaken to increase capacity within the SEND team, a new SEND Team Manager had recently been recruited. Work on aligning special place planning and sufficiency with all school place planning and sufficiency was being carried out.

It was reported that with regards to delivery and change, March 2022 was the date for Education Health and Care Plan and process to be in place and showing a difference. Bury2Gether are working with the Council co-produce a pilot looking at the assessment process which will be used when inducting the new staff that are joining the team going forward. This would be in place by the October half term break.

A schools' position statement would be going out this week to explain Project Safety Valve and a parents' position statement also going out this week.

The banding of Bury's Special Schools was being looked at as it was explained that when they were benchmarked against Greater Manchester there was quite a difference between the different local authorities and what they fund in the 'top-up' and funding of a place. It was explained that where you are in a place that has a greater number of special schools the complexity of need can be moderated next to what band funding that will match. In Bury the moderation of funding hasn't been particularly strong as there were just the two schools.

The delivery dates would be included in the update that would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

- Councillor Whitby asked what was different now from 2017 and 2019? Why should we be more confident that we can deliver this time when we haven't in the past.

It was explained that one of the challenges was the strategic drive and ownership of SEND. The work has been carried out and the commitment has been there, but this has been reactive to the written statement of action. There hadn't been the opportunity to strategically reset and have a shared strategy and ambition for Bury pupils. The question to ask now was what we want for Bury pupils and this had been highlighted by parents and carers as:

Less variability in inclusion
only have to tell their story once
Children's needs being met locally by local services and in the local area
Children to be encouraged in independence
Needs met in high quality education

There has been a forensic look at what has driven the high needs block and what is going wrong.

It was explained that there was a commitment to additional resource into the SEND transformation. There were also clear deadlines into when the deficit reduction is cleared.

There has been changes in the strategic leadership, but the position has now been filled on a permanent basis by Isobel which would provide strategic leadership and direction for SEND.

- Councillor Whitby explained that the report talks about increasing resource provision in the borough and asked whether the current provision was being fully utilised.

Paul Cooke referred to provision and explained that mainstream provision needs to be strong to meet the majority of the pupils' needs and where there are some additional needs, resource provision is developed such as enhanced units within the mainstream provision.

Appropriate capacity is then required within the specialist provision and only where needs are so great they can't be provided for in the borough will external provision be considered.

There was currently a mismatch as there wasn't the required resource provision which was needed that could then lead to inappropriately placing young people outside of the borough. There was therefore the need for additional provision geographically spread across the borough and linked to appropriate referral arrangements.

All of these need to be carried out in the round rather than in isolation to ensure that the system works well.

- Councillor Whitby also asked whether the cultural change set out would be successful.

Bury can't do SEND to, it has to be with and it has to be with co-production with parents, young people and schools. Everybody is aware of the challenges and everybody is committed to make the change. Confident of the support and guidance of Bury2Gether.

- Councillor Whitby referred to out of borough placements and asked if progress made by the children in out of borough placements was monitored and if the places were meeting the needs of the children.

Quality assurance in the independent sector is being looked at by Greater Manchester education leads and Greater Manchester SEND board. It is a challenge that Bury has only 2 special schools but there is coming online a new free school that Shaw Education Trust will be opening on the Unsworth site in September 2023 and a pre-approved special school for social, emotional & mental health provision as a primary need which was expected to open in 2024/2025.

- Councillor Wright referred to 4.7 of the report asked why there was a difference between the number of boys and girls on SEN.

It was explained that the national profile was that boys were more likely to be identified as having SEND and Bury's local breakdown matched the

national one. It was also reported that health colleagues were working on under identification of girls within the system.

- Councillor Wright referred to the planned reduction in the numbers of pupils being sent to out of borough placements and asked what the saving would be in relation to this.

Increasing inclusivity of mainstream schools and adding to the provision.

Ensuring that provision is in the right place is important.

It was reported that the cost difference from mainstream placements through to resource provision places and then to a maintained place through to an independent non maintained specialist place there is a big difference in costs upwards on average of £50,000 for an independent non maintained place sometimes more depending on the need. Bury has only the 2 special schools and places within these schools are significantly less costly. Developing new specialist provision will provide savings as well as being quality assured locally.

- Councillor Wright asked what work is being done to keep exclusions and suspensions down for SEND children and asked if there were any issues in relation to this with academies.

The introduction of the inclusion partnerships in schools has been really effective in reducing exclusions across the borough. Permanent exclusions have been reduced and there has been a big improvement in relation to fixed term exclusions. Work has been carried out with schools around better processes in relation to early identification and early intervention.

Quality Mark Standards have been developed and are used in relation to inclusion and schools can achieve the mark when performing well in this area. The standards are also used to carry out inclusion health checks in schools which then support schools which may require help.

Multi agency co production has also been working well to identify areas of need that may be affecting issues within schools but are health or social related.

Work has been carried out by the inclusion clusters to reduce exclusions and the council both supports and challenges all schools in relation to this.

The Council has a very strong relationship with the academies and the MATs across the borough and work closely with them.

- Councillor Wright referred to the review of speech and language therapy and asked where this was up to.

Isobel explained that an independent review on speech and language would be commissioned within the first half term and should be well on its way if not completed by Christmas.

- What work needs to be done to improve the figure of 27.2% in relation to EHC plans.

27.2% is timeliness in 2020 to go through the assessment process. The statutory requirements have been reduced to 20 weeks nationally this has been a challenge. Locally there have been issues with staffing but there have been improvements made but further improvements still required.

As of September, Bury are at 53% meeting the 20 week timescale which is 58% nationally. Last year was particularly challenging and this has been improved.

4.1% refers to the number of Bury young people with EHC plans which nationally is at 3.7% - Bury is slightly higher. Many have come from pre 5 and a small proportion from schools. There is already a request for pupil place planning to be reported to the Committee and this will go into further detail on this area.

- Councillor Cropper referred to section 6.9 of the report in relation to funding and asked for more information on where the money had been spent.

It was explained that the 4.3m in capital had been spent increasing resource provision and the plans for Elms Bank School.

The revenue side of things related to SEN transformation but it was explained that the additional funding each year would only be if the deficit reduction targets and there would be additional funding

- Councillor Cropper referred to funding of free school meals for children with SEN and asked whether the money provided had been sufficient.

It was explained that the Council had agreed to finance all free school meals in the summer break as well as providing a healthy activity programme where young people could access activities and nutritional food.

Food vouchers were also offered for families over the holiday period worth £15 per week.

Councillor Tariq asked that Sandra Bruce and Jamie Whitton be recognised for their hard work in relation to the provision of meals during the holiday periods. The Council were looking for providers to get involved with the scheme and there would be 3 further periods of provision for the rest of the academic year.

- Councillor Cropper referred to the roof at Millwood School and the fact that the hydrotherapy pool was currently closed and asked whether the building was fit for purpose.

Isobel Booter reported that she was aware that there were issues with the roof at Millwood School and the Council had procured contractors to carry out remedial work. With regards to the hydrotherapy pool all parents had been sent a letter to keep them updated of the situation.

- Councillor Lancaster referred to the Fit and Fed scheme that had been provided in Radcliffe and explained that nobody had attended.

Paul Cooke stated that he would take this information back to the relevant team.

- Councillor McBriar asked whether the funding for these schemes had been covered by funding provided by Government.

It was explained that the Council had also contributed.

- Councillor Boles referred to the questionnaire that had been mentioned to in the report and the concerns that had been raised by parents with regards to the assessment process for EHCPs and asked what work was being done around this.

It was reported that the council were working closely with the CCG and the Bury2Gether group which had over 1000 members to produce the pilot that had been referred to in the report.

- Councillor Staples-Jones referred to the communication strategy around Project Safety Valve and asked what this would look like and how it would work.

It was explained that the strategy would be looking to provide different communications for different audiences and would also give an opportunity for face to face communication rather than just having a website.

It was also reported that a communications officer had been secured to carry out a 10 month assignment of which SEND would be a key part of the work with additional support from the Corporate Core.

It was agreed:

That an update report be brought back to the Committee at the March 2022 meeting

CYPSC.5 SEPTEMBER RETURN TO SCHOOL UPDATE

Councillor Tariq presented a report giving an overview of the support provided to schools in preparation for the return of all pupils at the start of the new academic year 2021/2022 and in line with the government's COVID-19 operational guidance.

The report provided information in relation to the following:

- Preparation for the Start of the Autumn Term 2021
- Government Guidance
- Next Steps

It was explained that Officers would continue to work closely with the Headteachers Advisory Groups in line with national guidance.

CYPSC.6 URGENT BUSINESS

COUNCILLOR S WRIGHT
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 6.30 pm and ended at 8.45 pm)