

CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION & SKILLS SCRUTINY BOARD - 3
November 2020

MINUTES

Present: Councillors: M Allen, S Ashraf MBE, K Blunt (Vice-Chairman), M Brain, J Butler, M Gough (Chairman), J Hamilton, R Holt, A Mackenzie, L McCarthy, A Rebeiro, P Thomas and Mrs K Wild.

Officers: Louise Rees – Director of Children's Services and Skills
Tim Browne – Assistant Director - Inclusion & SEND
Bev Petch – Head of Alternative Provision
Joseph Bright – Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTING INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest.

3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

Two requests to make deputations were received – one by Sajida Golby, on behalf of the North Solihull Additional Needs Support Group, in regards to agenda item 6, Update on School Exclusions; Elective Home Education; School Attendance; Part-time timetables and Off-rolling. Councillor Blunt read out the deputation on behalf of Sajida Golby, where a number of points were raised, including the following:

- Families were requesting more accountability, due to the rise of
 - Children struggling within school, resulting in school refusal.
 - Part time timetables.
 - Exclusions
 - The need to go to tribunal and mediation to source suitable provision.
 - Concerns around Education, Health Care Plans – including content, delays in procedures, as well as reviews of existing plans. There were also concerns around legal policies and guidance not being adhered to.
 - Families feeling they had to pursue home education.
 - A need for more specialist and appropriate placements, to help prevent young people struggling, as well as enable reasonable adjustments.
 - Instances of expensive placements being funded, including where the child did not attend.
- It was important for the Local Authority, local support groups and Councillors to all work together to ensure all children with additional needs received the support they required. It was stressed how it mustn't take years for this to be achieved, short term solutions were required also, for the children being affected today.

Parent/carer meetings had been held with Councillors, Saqib Bhatti MP, the Director of Children's Services and Skills, as well as the Assistant Director for Inclusion and SEND, where a range of issues were raised, including the following:

- There were concerns that parents were having to pursue Elective Home Education, to protect their child's wellbeing and mental health. There were also concerns this was being suggested as an option to parents.

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- They were seeing a rise in children experiencing serious mental health issues – this was before Covid and had risen since. The importance of more and earlier mental health interventions was stressed, including via Schools.
- The need for greater specialist and suitable provision within the Borough was emphasised. The proposals regarding the new free school in the Borough were welcome; however there needed to be clear processes and support in place locally, to ensure Solihull children benefited.
- The volume of children with SEND being excluded was also raised.
- There were concerns that EHCPs were not being followed, completed in time and reviews were not being done in a timely fashion, in accordance with statutory requirements.
- It was recognised the LA was meeting the 20 week deadline for new plans; however the need to focus on the backlog of existing plans and reviews were also emphasised.
- The volume of parents having to secure placements via educational tribunals and the cost implications of this were raised – concerns were highlighted again, that this appeared to be being suggested as an option to parents.
- It was stated that young people were on part time timetables for longer than 6 weeks – the longest case, recently reported to the group, was 3 years. The importance of capturing accurate data in regards to part time timetables and off rolling numbers was emphasised.

It was requested for all the points raised as part of the deputation to be considered, to help everyone understand how the Solihull SEND community was feeling. As part of her deputation, Sajida Golby did also raise areas within Solihull that were working well, which included SENDIASS and the ongoing transparent conversations between the Group and the Director of Children's Services and Skills, as well as the Assistant Director for Inclusion and SEND.

The Chairman thanked Sajida Golby, and the North Solihull Additional Needs Support Group, for the deputation. He requested for Members to take into account the points raised, when considering agenda item 6.

Joanna Cole also made a deputation, in regards to holiday hunger and free schools meals. The point raised included the following:

- Joanna Cole detailed how she had been working as a volunteer within Solihull, during the epidemic, delivering food parcels across the Borough.
- It was highlighted how neighbouring boroughs had introduced free school meals.
- It was detailed how a large proportion of the local community faced financial crises as a consequence of Covid-19.
- There had been an increase in social welfare concerns, as well as poor mental health – it was emphasised how three critical incidents had been reported in the local community.
- It was explained how the Kingshurst Rainbow Alliance had been established, a collaboration between volunteers and local services, to deliver food parcels to individuals and families in need, as well as provide further support.
- An immediate response was required, to help prevent a further increase in social welfare and mental health concerns. Joanna Cole stated that, in the short term, the extension of free school meals supported children, in families facing financial hardship, to get access to one hot meal a day.

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- It was also detailed how, in the long term, a robust plan around sustainable food security and welfare issues needed to be developed between the Local Authority and the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Councillor Gough thanked Joanna Cole for making her deputation, as well as for all the voluntary work she had undertaken across the Borough. He responded to the deputation, raising the following points:

- The Council was a keen and active supporter and investor in the Borough's foodbank provision, having already provided £100,000 of funding for organisations like Helping Hands and setting aside a further £100,000 to ensure food supplies remained available for the rest of the financial year.
- This would be providing essential food throughout the school year, holiday periods and the coming lockdown to anyone who needed it, as soon as they needed it.
- In addition to this financial investment, the Council had assisted with the procurement of supplies to ensure that, where needed, food purchases could be made at scale, allowing more food to be purchased for more households than might otherwise have been possible if organisations were acting alone.
- This had been complemented by work also done by the Community Development Team to facilitate mutual aid.
- Accessing the food which was available through the Borough's foodbanks, like Helping Hands, could be arranged directly through a referral from Solihull Connect.
- One of the Council's priorities was "taking action to improve life chances in our most disadvantaged communities" – they had already done a lot that year and were continuously looking for opportunities to expand on what they could do to meet this aspiration. This was why the Council had been working with organisations like the Kingshurst Rainbow Alliance to explore how buildings like The Space could be brought into use for the benefit of the local community.
- Following the appointment of a new Head of Stronger Communities, the Council also now had more capacity to work with local organisations and communities on initiatives and projects which supported the Council's plans and aspirations.

5. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 17th September 2020, were presented. It was requested for an amendment to be made, to reflect Councillor Allen's attendance at the meeting.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a correct record, subject to the amendment above, to ensure Councillor Allen's attendance was recorded.

6. CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDER PRIORITIES 2020-21

The Cabinet Member presented his priorities for 2020-21, in relation to his responsibilities and the services provided by the Children's Services and Skills Directorate.

Members raised the following points and questions:

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- The Chairman highlighted how a number of priority areas of work and strategies were identified in paragraph 3.7. He questioned how the delivery of these strategies could be reported to future Scrutiny Board meetings, to help ensure Member input and oversight.
- The Cabinet Member detailed how the approval of these Strategies had been reported to his Cabinet Decision Sessions. He stated that Members representing the Opposition Groups would have attended these Sessions and he also noted the reports were on the Council website. He also stated how there could be additional reporting to Scrutiny if Members requested this.
- Members highlighted how the report detailed the youth offer in Solihull, where it explained many activities for young people took place in LA run youth centres at Castle Bromwich, Coronation and Hatchford Brook. It was stated that Coronation had not been available as a youth centre for some time and was subject to on-going renovation. Members requested further details of the plans to enhance the youth offer within the Borough, as part of the Council's wider Recover and Reset strategy.
- The Cabinet Member emphasised that a long standing challenge with youth centres had traditionally been that they were only used in the evenings when the youth clubs met. He explained how, for some time, they had been looking at better use of these centres as a community facility. The Cabinet Member also detailed how the youth offer had, for many years, been focused upon engaging young people who would not typically participate in traditional youth activities. It was explained how the Voluntary Sector provided a range of universal youth services, including via the Muslim Youth Association, the Scouts, as well as through the Colebridge Trust. In terms of future provision, the Cabinet Member detailed how they were pursuing a range of options, including the refurbishment of Coronation, whilst the youth provision in Kingshurst would be linked to the regeneration project there. He also noted they were looking at the potential for further day time provision at Castle Bromwich for vulnerable young people.
- Members highlighted how, as part of Sajida Golby's deputation, reference had been made to the increasing numbers of successful SEND tribunals, pursued by parents. Clarification was requested as to the volume of such cases for last year and the one prior. They also asked for the costs implications, as well as confirmation as to where the funding for this came from.
- The Director of Children's Services and Skills noted a similar question on this topic had previously been raised at Full Council – she confirmed she would look to get the data updated and shared.
- The Assistant Director for Inclusion and SEND explained there had been 22 tribunals in 2017, 18 in 2018, and 40 in 2019. It was noted this increase reflected trends across the country. The Assistant Director detailed how they were seeing about 2.3% of the Solihull SEND pupil population going to tribunal, which was slightly higher than the national average of 1.8% He stated how he anticipated an increase in tribunals in 2020. The Assistant Director also explained how they were experiencing a gradual rise in mediations, again reflecting trends across the country – 4 in 2017, 72 in 2018 and a similar number in 2019. It was noted the volume of mediation cases were higher than Solihull's statistical neighbours; however the Assistant Director emphasised such mediation could enable earlier interventions, rather than tribunals.
- Members requested for their thanks to be passed onto the head teachers and staff of local schools, as well as supporting Council Officers, for all their additional work during this challenging time. It was emphasised how many parents had been apprehensive about their children returning to school in

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September – they queried what data was available in regards to the children who hadn't returned to school, for both mainstream and special schools.

- The Cabinet Member also expressed his thanks to all the staff working in Solihull schools, as well as the supporting Council Officers. He emphasised how the re-opening of schools went extremely smoothly in Solihull, where the work, advice and consultation with schools was seen as a model of good practice. He detailed how they experienced a very high return rate in Solihull – 1 school had recorded 100%, whilst many had 85 to 90% of pupils returning. However, a concerning trend, both within Solihull and nationally, was the number of parents who had opted for Elective Home Education. The Cabinet Member acknowledged a proportion of this were parents of SEND children, who had concerns with the existing provision, as well as parents apprehensive about Covid-19.
- The Assistant Director for Inclusion and SEND confirmed attendances since September had been very strong, with many schools at 90% or higher, especially Primary Schools. Similar numbers were recorded for Secondary Schools in September – in the run-up to half term it was noted they saw increasing numbers of Secondary pupils having to self-isolate, with attendances at approximately 75 per cent. As a consequence, there was a switch to greater online learning. The Assistant Director emphasised all the work of the local head teachers and their leadership teams, which meant schools were safe places to be. It was confirmed that, as of that day, they had 45 cases across the whole pupil population, with 453 children self-isolating. The Assistant Director also detailed how they were tracking and monitoring children unable to go to school, especially where they had any additional need or vulnerability.
- Members emphasised how a role of Scrutiny was to review and evaluate outcomes. They also highlighted how the Cabinet Member report detailed a number of strategies – they queried the timescales for reporting on the delivery of these strategies, to enable the Scrutiny Board to review their effectiveness and make suitable recommendations.
- The Cabinet Member detailed how he found the performance reports he received helpful, which provided statistics and commentary across a broad range of indicators within the Children's Directorate. It was noted this information could be shared with the Scrutiny Board Chair and Vice-Chair, whilst the Opposition Spokespersons also had access to this.
- Members highlighted the development of the Joint Strategy for children and young people with additional needs – they noted the SEND strategic plan for 2017-20, querying whether an evaluation would be undertaken, assessing what had gone well and what areas required improvement. It was flagged up how the current plan contained 5 priorities and 62 indicators – it was queried how these were measured, to help assess effectiveness, as well as inform the new Strategy.
- The Cabinet Member explained how a key indicator was the volume of EHCP's completed within the statutory timescale of 20 weeks – it was noted 93% of new cases were completed by this deadline, whilst recognising the backlog of existing cases. He explained that it was difficult to provide timelines for the assessment of priorities and indicators due the pandemic and the on-going new pressures. The Director of Children's Services and Skills detailed how a key learning point from the 2017-20 SEND Strategy was the importance of ensuring co-production with parents.
- A Member highlighted paragraph 3.5, which detailed how the Council was continuing to focus its support on ensuring all pupils, particularly those who

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were vulnerable or had additional needs, successfully returned to schools, with additional funding being made available – they queried this additional funding and what it was being used towards.

- The Assistant Director for Inclusion & SEND confirmed there were two streams of funding that had been released – the national offer of 'catch-up' funding, that would go directly to schools, whilst the Council had released an extra £250,000 from the High Needs Block funding, to support children with additional needs. It was noted this funding focused on a couple of key aspects – children struggling to return to school and additional support for children with autistic spectrum conditions.
- Members flagged up the figures provided for the High Needs Block funding, noting it went up to end of 2020. They requested the latest figures for this, as well as anticipated future projections.
- The Director of Children's Services and Skills confirmed the carried forward deficit from the previous financial year was £6.039m and the projection for the end of the year was £8.539m.
- A Member highlighted youth services, querying specifically youth centres that could be made available in Chelmsley Wood, Kingshurst and Fordbridge and Smith's Wood. It was agreed that it would be arranged for the points raised to be shared with the Assistant Director for Communities and Partnerships.

RESOLVED

The Children's Services, Education and Skills Scrutiny Board:

- (i) Agreed for the Cabinet Forward Plan to be circulated to the Board, for future work planning.
- (ii) Endorsed the Children's Services and Skills Directorates reset and recovery work, as set out in paragraphs 3.2 to 3.6.
- (iii) Endorsed the further priority areas of work, as identified in paragraph 3.7.

7. UPDATE: SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS; ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION; SCHOOL ATTENDANCE; PART-TIME TIMETABLES AND OFF-ROLLING

The Assistant Director for Inclusion & SEND and the Head of Alternative Provision presented the report, updating Members on current trends, as well as on-going work with Schools regarding school exclusions, elective home education (EHE), school attendance, part-time timetables and off-rolling.

Heather Delaney was invited as a witness for this item, on behalf of the Solihull Parent Carer Voice, the new Parent Carer Forum for Solihull. Heather Delaney explained how, as parents and members of the Solihull Parent Carer Voice, they were acutely aware of the challenges SEND families were experiencing in the areas covered by the report, and she responded to them in turn:

Exclusions:

- It was noted the majority of students permanently excluded from schools had special educational needs, which raised concerns regarding existing SEND provision.
- It was requested for audits to be carried out, to detail where children with SEND were being excluded, the child's needs and the reason for exclusion.
- It was also suggested that these schools were asked to provide extra details of the existing SEN provision, particularly what support they were providing for

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children at risk of exclusions, as well as consideration of the support the child and the school were receiving from the LA.

- It was noted that the main reason for permanent exclusion was persistent disruptive behaviour – it was questioned what reasonable adjustments were being made for these children and young people, as well as what support were the schools seeking from SISS or the Educational Psychology Team. It was also queried whether they were applying for EHC assessments.
- It was requested for the LA to produce a guidance sheet for schools, detailing what was expected from them before they considered a permanent exclusion.

Fixed term exclusions:

- It was suggested that the number of fixed term exclusions was higher than reported.
- Heather Delaney detailed how the Forum frequently heard from parents explaining how they had been called to collect their child, with the schools citing reasons such as we can't calm them, they are upset, and we can't get them into the classroom. It was noted these cases were not being recorded as fixed term exclusions.
- It was explained how many of these children struggled with school anxiety – Heather Delaney emphasised how it was critical for the schools to work with families, Educational Psychologist's, SOLAR and SISS to support the child.

Elective Home Education:

- Heather Delaney stressed that many parents turned to Elective Home Education (EHE) due to negative school experiences. It was explained this could include negative experiences with the school, challenges ensuring their child's SEND needs were fulfilled, as well as being unable to secure suitable provision.
- Home education had a significant financial impact on families.
- Heather Delaney stated that, at present, home educating families felt they did not have a good relationship with the EHE Team. She explained they had a meeting booked with the Assistant Director for Inclusion & SEND and the Head of Alternative Provision and members of the Home Educating Community, and it was hoped this could provide an opportunity to move things forward.
- Heather Delaney also stated how they heard reports from parents that it was being suggested for them to pursue home education – concerns were expressed this was potentially being used as a form of off-rolling within the Borough.

Part-time timetables

- Heather Delaney stressed the importance of these timetables being used appropriately.
- It was requested for part-time timetables to be reported to the LA, for these to be regularly reviewed, with support programmes needed in place to support children back into full time education.
- Heather Delaney explained how parents reported that part-time timetables were put in place because the child was not managing in school, or it was not possible to secure the required support. It was detailed how these arrangements were not necessarily formally agreed, meaning they were not reported to the LA or reviewed. It was emphasised this happened across all types of school settings.

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- It was also requested for the LA to monitor part-time timetables for children attending schools out of the Borough.

Heather Delaney emphasised the importance of the child being at the centre and all parties – the LA, Schools, the EHE team and all service providers – must work together to help improve outcomes. She stressed how all parties needed to work closely together to support effective communication.

Members raised the following questions and observations, with responses provided by Officers:

- Members highlighted how the report explained there was a rising number of primary permanent exclusions for children with special education needs. It was noted that, of the 5 permanently excluded primary-aged pupils in 2019-20, all either already had an EHCP or went on to have one. Members requested confirmation these EHCP's were reviewed regularly and updated, emphasising the concerns raised about this with parents. They also questioned whether reasonable adjustments had been explored for these children.
- Members also raised the issue of Elective Home Education – they expressed their concerns a number of parents had reported to them that EHE had been suggested as an option to explore.
- The Head of Alternative Provision explained that, in regards to the 5 permanently excluded primary age children, the majority did not have an EHCP at point of exclusion. Where the child did have an EHCP, it was relatively new – reasonable adjustments were introduced; however, unfortunately it was not possible for the child to continue at the school.
- The Assistant Director for Inclusion & SEND confirmed there was a significant backlog of EHCP annual reviews to be completed. He detailed how they were putting forward a bid within the medium term financial strategy to secure additional funding for the StART team, to help address this backlog. It was emphasised the challenge of completing annual reviews was an issue across the country. The Assistant Director also asked that, if there were instances of parents being advised to explore EHE inappropriately, for details to be provided to him.
- A Member highlighted that the report stated exclusions for children with SEND were too high and needed to reduce – the Member requested examples of these SEND needs.
- The Head of Alternative Provision explained that, in regards to excluded pupils, the greatest SEN need was in regards to Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), both in primary and secondary schools. It was detailed that a significant proportion of permanently excluded secondary pupils who attended the Summerfield Pupil Referral Unit, were diagnosed with SEMH or other needs such as autistic spectrum conditions. It was emphasised how, in a number of instances, these additional needs may not have been diagnosed prior to exclusion.
- A Members also noted how the report explained that attendances for pupils eligible for free schools meals, as well as for disadvantaged pupils who benefited from Pupil Premium funding, were well below pupil levels nationally. They requested an age and gender breakdown of these pupils recording lower attendance rates. The Councillor queried what might be the underlying reasons for the lower attendances and also questioned how the gap could be closed.
- The Head of Alternative Provision emphasised that lower attendances amongst disadvantaged pupils was a national issue. It was explained how schools had

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to clearly account for their spending of the Pupil Premium funding, including providing a report via their websites. The Head of Alternative Provision explained how improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils was often a key thread throughout the work local schools were doing.

- A Councillor also highlighted paragraph 4.4.1 and emphasised they believed there were financial implications arising from the report, especially if the cost implications of SEND tribunals were taken into account. They also flagged up the issue of free school meal eligibility and requested a breakdown in regards to pupil age and gender. It was agreed that this information would be circulated to Members after the meeting.
- Members highlighted how the report stated off-rolling was not currently an issue in Solihull and Officers remained continuously vigilant to this. It was emphasised there had been an increase in EHE pupils – it was recognised there were concerns that EHE could potentially be used as a form of off-rolling. Members noted that LA's could not ever be certain that all electively home educated children had been identified, as there was no requirement for families to inform them. It was emphasised how increasing SEND provision was critical in reducing the volume of families pursuing elective home education.
- The Head of Alternative Provision explained that, in regards to off-rolling and EHE, if any parent informed them that they felt pressurised to remove their child from a local school, she would pursue this with the respective head teacher, on the basis it was not appropriate.
- Members queried how it was ensured that children not attending a school did receive some form of education. The Assistant Director for Inclusion & SEND explained that the LA looked to identify any pupils who may not be receiving the necessary support at home – it was requested that, if Members had concerns regarding any specific families, to let officers know and this would be investigated. It was detailed how, if any such cases were identified, the LA would look to engage with the family and, if there were any remaining concerns, they would pursue a School Attendance Order, where a specific school would be identified.
- Members highlighted how the report stated that 2 schools accounted for nearly 1/3 of permanent exclusions in the last academic year. They requested assurances there was sufficient support in place for schools to help prevent exclusions and enable earlier intervention measures. It was noted how some schools had consistently low, or no exclusions – it was questioned whether there was any potential learning here.
- The Head of Alternative Provision emphasised the range of support in place for pupils who may be at risk of exclusion. This included Alternative Provision that the child could attend for a limited period, rather than pursuing exclusions. The work of the Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) team, within the Specialist Inclusion Support Service (SISS) was also highlighted – here officers worked with children the schools had identified as being at risk of exclusion. The Head of Alternative Provision also detailed the role of the Education Psychology service, who were also focusing upon earlier interventions with children.
- Members emphasised some groups of parents may have opted for home education during Covid-19, because of underlying health needs. They queried what plans were in place, post-Covid-19, to support these pupils to return to school.
- The Head of Alternative Provision detailed how she believed Covid-19 had a significant part to play in the recent steep rise in EHE. It was not anticipated that all of these children would return to, or start, school, as some families had a positive experience of home education during lockdown. The Head of

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Alternative Provision explained that, at any point, a family who had chosen to home educate, could request for their child to return to school and go through the admissions process. It was explained that, as part of the Council's EHE Policy, if a family wished for their child to return to school, the Fair Access Panel would be likely to support a return to the original school – it was emphasised this could be challenging, as it may involve exceeding the year group numbers.

- Members expressed concern that, in some instances, EHE was not elective, noting cases in their own wards. They stressed the impact this had on families, whilst also recognising the pressures teachers and schools were under. Members highlighted that many schools within the Borough were part of Academy Trust and queried the powers the LA now had.
- The Assistant Director for Inclusion & SEND detailed how the LA had safeguarding responsibilities for every child within the Borough. It was emphasised how the relationship with schools had changed significantly over the last few years. It was confirmed the LA had positive relations with all schools and academies within the Borough; however, the Assistant Director explained that, if they had concerns in regards to a specific academy, the LA would liaise with the head teacher, CEO and the Board. He explained that, if the LA had any remaining concerns, they would be raised with the Regional Schools Commissioner. It was also detailed how the Ofsted inspection framework now focused on issues such as off-rolling.
- The Assistant Director for Inclusion & SEND emphasised how the LA wished to establish a new relationship with schools, as they all had responsibilities as an education system to ensure children achieved the very best they could. He detailed how the on-going discussions with head teachers, about how they could support the wider school system, to improve outcomes for children.
- A Member highlighted the written representation, submitted in advance by the North Solihull Additional Needs Support Group – this included a SEND survey on parental confidence in their schools' ability to meet their child's academic needs. It was noted confidence appeared to be lower amongst parents' with children receiving SEN support at primary school and the Councillor queried the underlying reasons behind this. They queried the potential for the Council, alongside partner agencies, to track through, from birth and early childhood, the readiness of children for Primary School, to help ensure the necessary support was in place. The Member also requested clarification whether the Schools were working with the Education Endowment Foundation report on SEN provision in mainstream schools.
- The Assistant Director for Inclusion & SEND explained how the importance of children being school ready was recognised, as well as ensuring schools were child ready. He highlighted the Early Years Strategy that was currently being developed, which linked with the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Priority focusing on maternity, childhood and adolescence and the first 1001 days. It was emphasised a particular focus was ensuring the right early year specialist provision was available. The Assistant Director confirmed the Education Endowment Foundation report was one of a number of key documents and reports being used by officers and schools to help close the gap, noting the work being undertaken by the School Improvement Team

RESOLVED

The Children's Services, Education and Skills Scrutiny Board:

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- (i) Noted the work of local authority officers, with schools, in regards to school exclusions, elective home education, school attendance, part-time timetables and off-rolling.
- (ii) Requested to put on record their thanks to Solihull Parent Carer Voice and the North Solihull Additional Needs Support Group for all the evidence and information they provided in advance of the meeting, as well as their contribution that evening; and
- (iii) Agreed for the minutes of this meeting, as well as the information submitted by Solihull Parent Carer Voice and the North Solihull Additional Needs Support Group to be shared with the Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills.

8. SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (NEET), FOLLOWING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Employment and Skills Manager presented the report, which updated the Scrutiny Board on the support provided to young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) during Covid-19. In considering the report, the Board agreed the year-on-year figures were positive, taking into account the impact of the pandemic. For instance, it was noted that 98.6% of Year 11s received an offer for September 2020 – in 2019, the position was almost the same, with 98.8% of Year 11s receiving an offer.

Members raised the following queries:

- Members highlighted how many local employers faced serious challenges recovering their businesses, due to the pandemic – they queried how, in the current circumstances, they could be encouraged to offer placements to young people.
- The Employment and Skills Manager explained how they looked to sell the benefits to employers of having a diverse workforce, as well as making them aware of funding options that could be explored. She also detailed how they helped employers through the process, looking at options such as 'job-carving' where roles were broken down into various part-time elements. The Employment and Skills Manager also explained how they pursued a number of measures to ensure the young person was as 'job ready' as possible, for instance, exploring mentoring opportunities where possible.
- Members queried what the biggest challenge was in supporting young people not in education, employment or training. The Employment and Skills Manager emphasised there were multiple challenges. It was explained that, specifically in the context of Covid-19, engagement was more of a challenge, especially as face-to-face meetings weren't possible. The Employment and Skills Manager detailed how it was disappointing the newly opened Recruitment and Training Centre had to close; however she explained how the outreach team had continued to support young people who were NEET, including managing referrals from the Job Centre as well as from other Council departments. It was also emphasised how they looked to increase awareness of the support available, via social media.

RESOLVED

The Children's Services, Education and Skills Scrutiny Board:

- (i) Noted the update on NEET figures and support in place for those who are or are at risk of becoming NEET.
- (ii) Noted the contribution of this work to tackling health inequalities and the Health and Well-being Strategy objective around adulthood and work. It

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was recognised that employment was a key determinant of long-term health and life expectancy and that focusing on this was essential to mitigate the longer-term economic impacts of Covid-19.

End time of meeting: 10.00 pm