

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION & SKILLS SCRUTINY BOARD - 11  
January 2022**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillors: M Gough (Chairman), A Mackenzie (Vice-Chairman), M Allen, K Blunt, M McCarthy, J O'Nyons, J Hamilton, L McCarthy, N Moses, A Rebeiro, S Freeman, S Golby and M Wilson

Councillor M Brain joined the meeting from 7:30pm onwards.

Councillor Tildesley and Mr B Hall, Diocesan representative, joined the meeting remotely.

**Officers:** Tim Browne - Interim Director of Children's Services  
Natalie Goulding – Employment and Skills Strategic Programme Manager  
Rachel Egan – Head of Inclusive Growth  
Leeanne Parker – Employment and Skills Manager, Skills Development  
Katie Oldham – Tracking Team Manager, Employment and Skills  
Shilpi Akbar – Head of Stakeholders and Communities, Skills, Employment and Education, Balfour Beatty VINCI  
Stuart McHale – Children's Services Finance Manager  
Sarah Cheale – Children's Services Finance Manager  
Joseph Bright – Democratic Services Officer

**1. APOLOGIES**

The following Members submitted their apologies:  
Councillor Clements (Councillor M McCarthy – substitute)  
Councillor Gibbin (Councillor O'Nyons – substitute)  
Mrs S Freeman – Co-opted Member

**2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTING INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS**

No questions or deputations were submitted.

**4. MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November, were presented.

Sajida Golby, Parent Governor Representative queried agenda item 5 – Support for Children and Young People (Aged 0-25 years) with Additional Needs, Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities. She highlighted the last bullet point of the minute, which stated Members were supportive of the proposed Additional Needs Strategy. She requested for it to be recorded that she was not supportive of the Strategy.

Sajida Golby also flagged up resolution (iv) for this agenda item and requested for it to be amended as follows:

## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION & SKILLS SCRUTINY BOARD - 11**

### **January 2022**

(iv) Agreed for a further report to be scrutinised in 12 months' time to review the progress made in the delivery of the Additional Needs Strategy.

#### **RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of the amendments detailed above.

#### **5. CAREERS ADVICE AND SUPPORT FOR NEET YOUNG PEOPLE**

Officer presented the report, which outlined details of careers advice provided by local education and training providers. They also informed Members how young people who were not in employment, education or training (NEET) were identified and supported with suitable education and training provision.

Members raised a number of queries and observations which, in summary, included the following:

- Members highlighted how the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill included proposals for the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) which should make it easier for young people and adults to study flexibly. They queried what measures could be undertaken to ensure a good uptake of this loan by young people and adults from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- The Head of Inclusive Growth detailed how they would be working with Solihull College and other partners to develop a strategy for the adult education budget within Solihull. As part of this, there would be focus upon linking this budget with the LLE, to help ensure adults and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds were able to access funding and loans, where necessary.
- Members flagged up how the report stated there had been some delays in rolling out the Kickstart programme, due to a low number of referrals from Job Centres – they requested a further update on this.
- The Employment and Skills Strategic Programme Manager detailed how, at the end of last year, Job Centre Plus Work Coaches had been co-located within the recruitment and training centre, the Youth Hub. This had really helped day-to-day communication and ensuring people were referred to the vacancies available. There had also been focus upon promotion of vacancies available – this had included workshops, where young people had been supported through the application process.
- Members noted how the Careers Hub provided support, including the production of a suite of video content to showcase roles, as well as reflect organisational equality, diversity and inclusion. They queried whether this included support for disabled children.
- The Employment and Skills Manager confirmed it did and also detailed the work undertaken by the Council and Careers Hub with local special schools and alternative provisions. She also explained how they were developing specialist resources for pupils with additional needs undertaking transitions.
- A Member flagged up how one of the main elements of the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill was to 'put beyond doubt the ability of the Office for Students to determine minimum requirements for quality by reference to absolute performance levels for student outcomes' and requested clarification on this.
- The Head of Inclusive Growth explained how they believed the 'absolute performance levels' was referring to minimum performance levels and the Office for Students would lead upon determining this. She confirmed she would seek further clarification and provide an update for Members.

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION & SKILLS SCRUTINY BOARD - 11

### January 2022

- Members detailed how local businesses had expressed interest in hiring apprenticeships and queried how they could signpost them to support. They also sought clarification on the support available, if any young people approached Councillors about apprenticeship roles as well.
- The Employment and Skills Strategic Programme Manager detailed the role of Employer Engagement Officers, who were always happy to engage with local businesses. She also highlighted the role of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership, who were able to offer specialist support to local businesses, as well as signpost to different funding options for training. In regards to young people, the Employment and Skills Strategic Programme Manager detailed the Skills for Success programme, which provided support for anyone interested in apprenticeships.
- Members queried whether there was any clarity on when the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill would be introduced.
- The Head of Inclusive Growth explained the Bill was now at the report stage and a date for introducing the Bill was yet to be determined – the Head of Inclusive Growth would look to provide a further update on this, when possible.
- Members highlighted how a proposal of the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill was to require schools to put on three encounters with providers of approved technical education qualifications or apprenticeships. They queried what provision could be put in place for pupils moving schools, children unable to attend school, as well as children who were home educated.
- The Employment and Skills Manager detailed the Compass+ tool, which enabled tracking and reporting on schools careers provision at the individual student level – they were exploring how this tool could be used when pupils moved schools. She also detailed how officers looked to link with the virtual school, including attending virtual governing board meetings and sharing information, such as apprenticeship and training opportunities.
- The Employment and Skills Strategic Programme Manager also explained that, in regards to electively home educated (EHE) children, they had made a commitment to contact these families twice a year, and share information about the support available in regards to career, education and training opportunities.
- Members queried the engagement undertaken with young people who were NEET, once they had passed Years 12 and 13.
- The Employment and Skills Strategic Programme Manager detailed how it was a statutory requirement to track the progress of 16-18 year olds; however a wide variety of support was still available after this point. The Solihull Youth Employment Promise programme was for young people up to the age of 29. It was detailed how some young people may require support for some time – this may include confidence building, as well as attending training. It was also explained that, if appropriate, specialist support for young people may be sought from other agencies.
- Members questioned the support in place for children looked after, as well as care experienced young people.
- The Employment and Skills Strategic Programme Manager detailed how there were strong links with Children's Services, whereby officers worked together to identify whether any children looked after, as well as care experienced young people, may be at risk of becoming NEET, or were NEET and identify potential support and programmes available. Direct support would be provided via an appropriate officer to help the young people develop an action plan and plan their next steps.

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION & SKILLS SCRUTINY BOARD - 11 January 2022

- A Member detailed how certain job roles may require specific clothing and specialist equipment – they queried the provision in place for young people who may experience difficulties accessing this.
- The Employment and Skills Strategic Programme Manager detailed how, in the first instance, the young person would be encouraged to engage with their work coach, to access DWP Flexible Support funding. In addition, the Employment and Skills Team had provided funding for young people, where necessary. There was also the local charity, Suited for Success, which provided a range of support for people accessing employment, including coaching, interview preparation, as well as clothing.
- A Member flagged up how the report detailed new local opportunities that were becoming available through developments and infrastructure projects and they also highlighted how it was projected that UK Central Hub would create just under 13000 additional jobs. They queried how many of these roles could be fulfilled by local residents, including NEET young people.
- The Head of Inclusive Growth detailed how, as part of any work commissioned by the Urban Growth Company, there was focus upon the contractual arrangements and social value, to ensure the maximum possible jobs opportunities for local people. They also highlighted the role of the Council Social Value Policy, a revised version of which had recently been approved by the Cabinet Member for Resources.
- The Head of Inclusive Growth explained that a priority of the Council was enduring local residents, especially young people, were aware of the opportunities that would be becoming available through these future developments. The Employment and Skills team also focused upon ensuring local young people had access to the necessary advice and support about potential future employment opportunities and developments, to help ensure they did not become NEET.
- A Member highlighted how the report detailed the volume of young people from the Year 12 and 13 cohort who were classified as NEET and 'Not known.' They queried what proportion of these young people had SEND and also questioned how many could be unidentified young carers.
- The Employment and Skills Strategic Programme Manager detailed the arrangements in place to closely track, monitor and support young people with SEND up until the age of 25 years. They also explained how they had worked with the Young Carers association over a number of years – it was confirmed young carers were a priority group, with support provided via the Skills for Success programme.
- A Member highlighted children with additional needs attended education outside of the Borough – they queried how they were engaged.
- The Employment and Skills Strategic Programme Manager detailed how there were good working relationships with neighbouring authorities in regards to sharing information on pupils receiving education outside of the Borough, as well as providing the necessary support. The Tracking Team Manager also detailed the arrangements in place to ensure the necessary data was collated in regards to any pupils attending out of Borough education.
- A Member queried how local parent carer support groups could be further engaged in regards to local employment, education or training opportunities.
- The Employment and Skills Strategic Programme Manager detailed how, as part of awareness raising, they had invested more resources into their engagement and communications strategy, for the next two years. It was also

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION & SKILLS SCRUTINY BOARD - 11 January 2022

confirmed they would be happy to share information with any local community groups, to promote the opportunities and support available.

- A Member noted the report detailed the work undertaken with the Solihull Chambers of Commerce and they also highlighted the Solihull Tourism Forum. They queried whether there were any opportunities to strengthen the links with these groups.
- The Employment and Skills Manager confirmed there were links with the Solihull Tourism Forum and they were due to meet them shortly. She also detailed the close work undertaken with the Solihull Chambers of Commerce – this included supporting the Life Ready programme, as well as closely collaborating with local schools and colleges.
- A Member flagged up the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill, specifically how the local skills improvement plans (LSIP) would be developed by local education providers and businesses. They queried how the Council could influence the development of LSIPs, whilst also considering other factors, such as the introduction of T Levels.
- The Head of Inclusive Growth detailed how the LSIPs would sit at a Combined Authority geographic level. The Pilots undertaken so far indicated the employer engagement would be led by the local Chambers of Commerce. Within Solihull the Council had very strong and long established links with the Solihull Employment and Skills Board (SESB), which included the Solihull Chambers of Commerce.
- The Head of Inclusive Growth explained that, in regards to the introduction of T Levels, it was recognised this included a significant work experience element, whilst the pandemic had placed major pressures on local employers. It was confirmed there was close ongoing engagement on this.
- A Member welcomed the support in place for young people, including those who were or could become NEET. They queried whether it could be possible to produce a map or some form of graphic, illustrating the range of programmes available, which could be used by local schools and careers advisors.
- The Employment and Skills Manager explained that, via the Gatsby Foundation, there had been consideration of various ways of communicating with young people, families and careers advisors the pathways available – further updates on this could be shared with Members. The importance of tailoring support to the needs of the individual was also emphasised, which meant visual representations that illustrated all career, education and training opportunities was challenging.
- A Councillor queried the repayment arrangements for the Lifelong Loan Entitlement. They also questioned whether there was support in place in regards to repayments if an individual's circumstances changed.
- The Head of Inclusive Growth explained the details into repayment arrangements, as part of the Bill had not yet been determined, but an update to Members could be provided, once available. It was noted that other training-related loans had followed a similar approach to higher education student loans, linked to earnings.
- A Member referred to the introduction of T Levels and existing BTEC courses. It was noted how those qualifications which overlapped with T Levels could be de-funded. They queried the arrangements in place, emphasising how BTECs had been crucial in supporting social mobility and enabling more students to access further education.
- The Head of Inclusive Growth detailed how they worked in close partnership with local key education providers, such as Solihull College, as well as

## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION & SKILLS SCRUTINY BOARD - 11 January 2022**

employers, to consider the introduction of T levels, to manage the transition from BTECs and ensure the right provision was in place. This was being linked to the development of the Local Skills Improvement Plans. The Employment and Skills Manager also explained that, as part of the Careers Hub, they were currently working with an organisation called Inside Uni, to focus upon the engagement of young people who may not normally consider accessing University and Further Education.

### **RESOLVED**

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

- (i) Noted the careers advice and support in place for NEET young people.
- (ii) Supported the longstanding, close work undertaken with the Solihull Chambers of Commerce and the Solihull Tourism Forum and welcomed the exploration of any further opportunities to strengthen these links.
- (iii) Supported the development of flowcharts and other visual representations of the employment, education and training opportunities that were available, which could be used by young people and career advisors.
- (iv) Agreed for the Scrutiny Board to receive a future report on the introduction and delivery of the changes stemming from the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill.

### **6. MTFS UPDATE – BUDGET STRATEGY 2022/23 – 2024/25**

The Children's Services and Skills Finance Manager presented the report. Member comments were sought on the budget proposals identified for 2022/23 to 2024/25 within the Children's Services and Skills cabinet portfolio, to go forward to the Resources and Delivery Value Scrutiny Board on 1<sup>st</sup> February and to Full Cabinet on 10<sup>th</sup> February.

The Children's Services and Skills Finance Manager explained that the focus of the budget strategy this year had been on managing the significant financial challenges faced by the Council. As part of this, Cabinet Portfolio Holders had once again not been asked to propose savings to meet a corporate target, but instead had identified options for mitigating service pressures.

In addition, the Scrutiny Board was informed how the Budget Strategy Group had also considered some specific pressures and agreed to recommend the inclusion of additional funding through the medium term financial strategy (MTFS) for a number of priorities, including significant investment in children's placements, children's social care and the implementation and monitoring of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities improvement plan.

The Children's Services and Skills Finance Manager detailed how, following the publication of the report, there had been updates from Central Government, following the Spending Review published in October 2021. The specific funding allocations receivable for Solihull had now been confirmed. As such that an additional £1.5m funding per annum for children's placements for the next 3 years, plus a £0.5m one off contribution to the reserve fund was to be proposed for the Portfolio. It was noted this was in addition to the funding identified by the Budget Strategy Group, outlined in paragraph 3.2.

The specific portfolio considerations were highlighted, in particular paragraph 3.11 (e) – Other Risks. It was explained confirmation had now been received that the £2.689m of social care grant funding would continue beyond the current financial year.

## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION & SKILLS SCRUTINY BOARD - 11 January 2022**

Members were also invited to consider the proposed schedule of fees and charges relevant to this Scrutiny Board, attached at Appendix B.

Having received the presentation, Members raised queries and observations, which in summary included the following matters:

- The Chairman emphasised how he welcomed the approach taken by the Budget Strategy Group, in recommending the inclusion of significant additional funding through the MTFs for a number of priority areas within Children's Services.
- Members highlighted the key pressures outlined in the report regarding Children's Social Care Placements – it was noted how, in terms of UASC, there had been an exceptional increase in costs for some young people with very complex needs, who had been subject to Trafficking and Modern Slavery. This had resulted in the Local Authority needing to place these young people in secure or high cost residential placements, which had meant the Council was paying considerably more than the amount provided by the Home Office. Members requested an update on the work being undertaken to help secure additional funding from the Home Office.
- The Children's Services and Skills Finance Manager detailed how the Leader and the Chief Executive had made representations about this to the Home Office. A bid for exceptional circumstances funding had also been submitted to the Home Office. It was detailed how the Council had been successful, over a number of years, in securing additional funding from the Home Office to support UASC – the representations to the Home Office had been made, following the recent exceptional increase in costs.
- A Member referred to the ongoing pressures on Children's Social Care Placements. They highlighted how the report stated that the Local Authority had been able to recruit newly qualified social workers, which in itself created capacity issues as they had lower caseloads. The Councillor requested for further clarification regarding this.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services detailed how newly qualified social workers had caseloads of 0.6, relative to experienced social workers. It was confirmed the Council had had some success in recruiting newly qualified social workers – in addition to this, the Budget Strategy Group had recommended for further resources to fund additional staffing and oversight in Children's Social Care, which would include the creation of 6 more senior practitioner posts, who would provide support to ASYE (assessed and supported year in employment) social workers.
- A Member welcomed the ongoing funding to support the implementation and monitoring of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) improvement plan. They expressed concern about the volume of money spent on SEND tribunals and mediation. They also queried whether further information on this could be reported to the Scrutiny Board.
- The Interim Director of Children's Services emphasised it was important that officers were able to make their professional judgement in regards to SEND assessments and EHCPs, whilst parent carers, when mediation does not provide the outcome they would have wanted, had the right to appeal via an independent tribunal process. The Interim Director detailed the focus upon increasing local provision within the Borough – this had included an increase in specialist provision by 19 percent over the last 5 years, whilst the Heights Special Free School was due to open in September 2023, which would

## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION & SKILLS SCRUTINY BOARD - 11 January 2022**

specialise in support for pupils with autism. The Council was also focusing upon increasing its Post-16 offer for pupils with SEND. The Interim Director also explained how it was important that the Council took into account the review of the SEND framework, which the Government was due to publish later this year.

- Members highlighted SEND transport, noting the additional funding options had been set out in Appendix A – they flagged up this was projected to be £575,000 for 2021/22 and £500,000 for 2022/23 and queried this. The Interim Director of Children's Services emphasised a key factor here was the increase of specialist provision and capacity for pupils within the Borough, which should reduce help the volume of children having to travel to out of the Borough to attend placements.

### **RESOLVED**

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

- (i) Noted the pressures and mitigating actions set out in Appendix A.
- (ii) Noted the budget proposals outlined in the report.
- (iii) Noted the schedule of fees and charges proposed for 2022/23.
- (iv) Agreed for the points raised as part of this agenda item to be shared with the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board.

## **7. WORK PROGRAMME - 2021/22**

A copy of the Board's Work Programme for the rest of the Municipal Year was included as part of the agenda. No additional comments or observations were made at that point in time.

### **RESOLVED**

That the contents of the Work Programme be noted.

End time of meeting: 8:25pm.