

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2017

Present:

Councillor Reid – in the Chair

Councillors Sameem Ali, Collins, Hewitson, Lone, Madeleine Monaghan, K Simcock and Stone

Co-opted Voting Members:

Mrs B Kellner, Representative of the Diocese of Manchester

Co-opted Non Voting Members:

Mr L Duffy, Secondary sector teacher representative

Ms J Gudgeon, Primary sector teacher representative

Councillor S Newman, Executive Member for Children's Services

Councillor Rahman, Executive Member for Schools, Culture and Leisure

Mr Lomas, Friends of Nutsford Vale

Apologies:

Councillors Alijah and Lovecy

Mrs J Miles, Representative of the Diocese of Salford

Ms M Neall, Parent Governor Representative

CYP/17/36 Minutes

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2017.

CYP/17/37 Feedback from the Committee's Visit to Barton Moss Secure Care Centre

The Chair informed the Committee about a visit which some Committee Members had made to Barton Moss Secure Care Centre. She advised that Members had previously visited Wetherby Young Offenders Institution and that Barton Moss was also a secure facility but was more like a Children's Home. She reported that it was an outstanding centre which provided fantastic support to young people.

CYP/17/38 New Central / East Secondary School

The Committee received a report of the Interim Director of Education which provided an update on the proposed establishment of a new secondary school in central / east Manchester to meet a growing need for secondary school places. It included specific detail on the approach to site selection, site investigations and surveys, stakeholder engagement and initial design. It also set out the proposed timescale for completing the school and the challenges facing the city if this timescale was not achieved.

Councillor Reid informed the Committee that she would not chair this item as she had supported the 'Save Nutsford Vale' campaign, which opposed the proposed site for the new school, and that Councillor Sameem Ali would chair this item.

The Interim Director of Education introduced the report across its main themes.

The Chair invited Mr Lomas from the Friends of Nutsford Vale to address the Committee. Mr Lomas informed the Committee how the local community, supported by funding from a range of sources, had redeveloped the area formerly known as Jackson's Tip into a well-used park area. He expressed concern that it was now proposed to build a school on the site and reported that his group felt there had been a lack of transparency in the process and that the report presented to the Committee did not accurately reflect the responses to the consultation on this issue. He expressed concern at contamination on the site and that the risk of excavating the site had not been fully assessed and asked Members to oppose this proposal.

A Member who was also a Ward Councillor for Gorton South reported that he had supported the 'Save Nutsford Vale' campaign and would continue to do so. Another Member who was also a Ward Councillor for Gorton South agreed with Mr Lomas' comments and reported that other local Members also supported this campaign. She advised that, while more secondary school places were needed, they did not need to be in this area, which already had a large secondary school and a special school for autistic children. She questioned why other options had been discounted and advised that, until the Council received the independent toxicology report on the Nutsford Vale site, it could not comment on how contaminated the site was. She advised that more investigation was needed, including further consideration of other options.

The Interim Director of Education reported that the local secondary school, Cedar Mount Academy, was full and that, as most provision for autistic children was co-located with mainstream provision, it was not inappropriate to build a new school close to The Grange Special School. She outlined the steps taken to increase consultation with the local community, including leaflet distribution, holding events for the local community and attending stakeholder meetings.

In response to a Member's question, the Interim Head of Access reported that, if this proposal went ahead, the land would still be owned by the Council but would be leased to the Academy for a 125 year period.

The Director of Trading Services informed the Committee that the increasing school population presented a challenge for the Council and there was a shortage of available sites within the city to build new schools. He advised Members that the Council had looked across the city for a suitable site for a new secondary school and there were no other suitable sites which were Council-owned and, without a willing seller, the Council could not acquire private land for a new school.

In response to a Member's question, the Head of Major Capital Programmes acknowledged that there was some contamination at the site, and drew Members' attention to section 4.11 within the report which outlined identified hazards and the action required to address them. A Member advised that she believed these hazards

made the site unsuitable to build a school on. The Head of Trading Services advised that the Council had previously built schools on contaminated land and had spent substantial sums of money to make the sites safe. A Member expressed concern that she had not been aware of this, despite one of these schools being in her ward.

A Member stated that it was important to have green spaces for community use and improved air quality and to consider whether the provision of green spaces in less affluent areas was being disproportionately affected by new developments. The Head of Trading Services agreed that officers would look at the issue of the loss of green spaces.

The Interim Director of Education advised that there was a shortfall in secondary places and the Council had a statutory duty to find places for all secondary-age children. She advised that an independent review was taking place of the contamination on the site and the Council's proposals to address these issues in order to ensure that the proposed new school would be safe for children and staff.

The Executive Member for Schools, Culture and Leisure reported that there had been a good level of consultation and engagement on this proposal. In response to a Member's question, he advised that the Council needed to wait for the outcome of the independent review before deciding if this would proceed to the planning process and emphasised that the Council would not build a school on a site which was not safe for children.

A Member asked what the alternative plan was, if this site was not suitable. The Interim Director of Education reported that a number of new Free Schools had been approved by the government which would increase the availability of secondary school places. She advised that, if this proposal could not go ahead, the Council would have to consider whether the number of places at these new schools and at the existing secondary schools within the city could be increased.

A Member requested that the independent review be considered by the Committee at a future meeting and that the Interim Director of Education explore the option of increasing capacity at existing secondary schools and approved new Free Schools as an alternative to building a new school. The Committee voted unanimously to accept these recommendations.

Decision

To request that the independent review of the Nutsford Vale site be considered by the Committee at a future meeting and that the Interim Director of Education explore the option of increasing capacity at existing secondary schools and approved new Free Schools as an alternative to building a new school.

[Councillors Reid and Stone declared a personal interest as they had supported the 'Save Nutsford Vale' campaign.]

CYP/17/39 Proposed closure of Buglawton Hall School

The Committee received a report of the Interim Director of Education which outlined a proposal to close Buglawton Hall Special School which was a residential special school for boys with social, emotional and mental health needs, located near Congleton, Cheshire East. The Committee was invited to comment on the report prior to its submission to the Executive on 13 September 2017. The Interim Director of Education introduced the report across its main themes.

A Member expressed concern at the length of the formal consultation period and asked whether this could be extended. The Interim Director of Education informed the Committee that the length of the formal consultation period had been affected by the 'purdah' period preceding the general election and by the school holidays; however, she advised, that the length of the consultation met the statutory requirements. Furthermore, she informed Members that the Council had held an informal consultation period prior to this. She advised that the regulations did not permit the consultation period to be extended nor the decision to be delayed.

A Member reported that he supported the closure of the school as Manchester had provision to support children with social, emotional and mental health needs, including other schools within the Manchester Federation of EBSD (Emotional Behavioural and Social Disorders) Schools. He advised that the money could be better used within the city to support children at Manchester-based special schools and to support children with special needs in mainstream provision. He also expressed concern at the attendance levels for some of the pupils and advised that part-time residential schools were not the most effective model for these children.

The Chair reported that she also agreed with the proposal to close the school, stating that it was too far from Manchester, was not fully utilised and was too expensive, particularly in light of the pressures on the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant. She outlined the Council's current approach of trying to keep young people with their families, through Early Help, and advised that Manchester now had a number of tools to support children and families such as Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) and the Adolescent Support Unit Alonzi House.

A Member agreed with the proposal but advised that it was important to look closely at what happened to the pupils who were currently enrolled at the school. In response to a Member's question, the Interim Director of Education advised that, if it was determined through their Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) review, that a residential school place was needed for any of the pupils then this would be provided through an independent provider.

The Executive Member for Children's Services acknowledged the good work of the staff at Buglawton Hall School but advised that the school was not financially or educationally sustainable. She advised that it was using a disproportionate amount of the High Needs Block and that the educational needs of the pupils could be met in a different way.

In response to a Member's question, the Interim Director of Education reported that there were a number of options for the site and that, if the closure was approved,

these would developed in more detail and taken to the relevant Committee for consideration.

Decision

To endorse the recommendation to the Executive:

That the Executive approve the proposal to close Buglawton Hall Residential Special School with effect from 31 March 2018.

CYP/17/40 School Place Planning and Admissions

The Committee received a report of the Interim Director of Education which provided an update on school place allocations for the intake of Reception and Year 7 pupils in the 2017/18 academic year. The report also outlined the future need for additional places and the approach to securing them. The Interim Director of Education provided an overview of the report.

The Executive Member for Schools, Culture and Leisure highlighted that the Council had successfully identified school places for all children who required them and that most had been allocated a place at their first preference school; however, he advised that there were further challenges ahead due to increasing demand and the difficulty in identifying sites to build more schools.

The Committee discussed the issue of siblings being allocated places at different schools. The Interim Head of Access reported that a small number of siblings were allocated places at different schools, due to the pressure on school places. She outlined the process for allocating school places at community and voluntary controlled schools in relation to sibling priority. She clarified that this issue mainly affected families who had newly arrived into the city and those who submitted their applications after the deadline for Reception and Year 7 places. The Chair requested further information on the number of siblings who had been allocated places at different schools.

The Chair also emphasised the importance of considering the implications for school places when identifying sites for housing developments.

Decisions

1. To note the position in relation to school place allocations
2. To request further information on the number of siblings who have been allocated places at different schools.

CYP/17/41 School Governance Update

The Committee received a report of the Interim Director of Education which outlined the support that the City Council had provided to assist with the development of effective school governance across the city over the past three years and outlined key priorities for 2017/18 including: governor recruitment, governor training, development and resources, school quality assurance and external reviews of

governance. The Interim Director of Education introduced the report. Members welcomed the report. A Member emphasised the impact governors could have on a school and the importance that Ofsted gave to having an effective governing body.

A Member asked how more Academies could be encouraged to engage with the Council to improve their school governance. The School Governance Lead advised that there had been an increase in Chairs of Academy Governing Bodies attending Chair briefing sessions. She advised that there was an increasing number of Academies joining local Multi-Academy Trusts so it was expected that, where the Trust was already engaging with the Council, any new academies joining it would also be engaged. She added that the Council was actively working to engage with Academies and find out what support would be useful to them.

The Chair expressed concern that there was not sufficient promotion of the Manchester Schools Alliance and recommended that it be promoted to encourage more Free Schools and other Academies to engage.

A Member noted that one of the School Governance Unit's priorities for the new school year was to examine the demographics of the school governance community in Manchester to explore any under-represented groups. The School Governance Lead stated that it was proposed to start by including equality monitoring data on the application form for local authority governors. She advised that she could then approach governing bodies to ask if they would be willing to provide equality monitoring data for their governors, whether they felt that their governing body did represent their local community and anything they felt could be done to assist them in becoming more representative. The Chair recommended that the Council work to increase recruitment of school governors who reflected the diversity of the local community.

Decisions

1. To recommend that the Manchester Schools Alliance be promoted to encourage more free schools and other academies to engage.
2. To recommend that the Council work to increase recruitment of school governors who reflected the diversity of the local community.

CYP/17/42 Post-Ofsted Improvement Plan Update: Proxy Indicators and other measurements to evaluating performance

The Committee received a report of the Deputy Director of Children's Services which provided high level information on the performance in managing contact, referral and assessment activity. The report also provided some analysis of the overall quality of professional social work practice and outcomes for children who required the service. The report noted the methodology in reporting performance including the use of proxy indicators. The Deputy Director of Children's Services introduced the report across its main themes.

A Member asked for further information on the reasons that practice standards were recorded as 'not met' in a significant proportion of cases. The Deputy Director

reported that some of the themes which emerged from the auditing of cases related to consistency and quality of practice. He further advised that some of the factors which could impact on performance included the complex and demanding nature of some cases, the amount and intensity of casework, the quality of professional supervision and the quality of partnership engagement. He highlighted the work to improve quality of practice, which was outlined in section 2.4 of the report. The Executive Member for Children's Services advised that sometimes cases did not meet the standards because the voice of the child was not reflected in the report.

The Executive Member for Children's Services reported that there had been significant improvement since 2014. She highlighted the reduction in the number of referrals and repeat referrals. She advised that there had been a reduction in the number of referrals with no further action taken due to the Early Help Strategy which was now in place. She emphasised, however, that further improvement was still needed and outlined work to ensure that learning from audits was fed back into the service so the same mistakes were not repeated.

The Chair advised that, while the Council had invested significantly in recruiting social workers, retention was still an issue. She expressed concern at the number of cases where practice standards were not met and requested that a breakdown of the 'not met' cases, including case studies if appropriate, be incorporated into a future report.

Decisions

1. To note the report
2. To request that a breakdown of the cases which had 'not met' practice standards, including case studies if appropriate, be incorporated into a future report.

CYP/17/43 Ofsted Subgroup Terms of Reference

The Committee received a report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit which provided the Committee with the revised terms of reference for the Ofsted Subgroup which the Committee was asked to agree. The report also included the current work programme for the Subgroup.

The Chair of the Ofsted Subgroup advised that, following the Committee's decision that the Subgroup should consider the recent Ofsted Monitoring Visit letter, this report requested that the Subgroup's terms of reference be revised so that this fell within its remit. He advised that all Members of the Committee were invited to attend the next Ofsted Subgroup meeting on 12 September, when this would be considered.

Decision

To agree the revised terms of reference and work programme of the Ofsted Subgroup.

CYP/17/44 Overview Report

A report of the Governance and Scrutiny Support Unit was submitted. The overview report contained key decisions within the Committee's remit, responses to previous recommendations and the Committee's work programme, which the Committee was asked to approve.

Decision

To approve the work programme.