

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 6 September 2023

Present:

Councillor Reid – in the Chair

Councillors N Ali, Amin, Fletcher, Gartside, Hewitson, Judge, Lovecy, Ludford, Muse and Nunney

Co-opted Voting Members:

Mr G Cleworth, Parent Governor Representative

Also present:

Councillor Bridges, Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People

Councillor Flanagan, Ward Councillor for Miles Platting and Newton Heath

Councillor Hitchen, Ward Councillor for Miles Platting and Newton Heath

Apologies:

Councillors Bell, McHale and Sharif Mahamed

Canon S Mapledoram, Representative of the Diocese of Manchester

Ms L Smith, Primary Sector Teacher Representative

Mr Y Yonis, Parent Governor Representative

CYP/23/34 Urgent Business - Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in Schools

The Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People reported that there was one school in Manchester which was confirmed as being affected by the RAAC issue and that this was All Saints C of E Primary School, Newton Heath. He informed Members that the Council was supporting the school, Ward Councillors had also offered support and that the school had been allocated a caseworker from the Department for Education (DfE). He advised that this issue would not have a significant impact on teaching within the school as the RAAC was in the school hall and that other community facilities were being considered, in case these were needed.

The Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People outlined the national context of this issue, in particular a reduction in spending on rebuilding schools over the previous 13 years. He expressed concern about the lack of information provided to the Council by the DfE on which schools were affected and which schools had not completed surveys, advising that the Council could provide support to schools with this. He advised that he would keep Councillors updated as the situation developed, including communicating with Ward Councillors with an affected school in their ward.

The Director of Education outlined to the Committee who the responsible body was for different types of schools. She explained that the Council was the responsible body for community maintained and voluntary controlled schools and that the relevant Diocese was responsible for voluntary aided schools. For academies in a

multi-academy trust (MAT), the MAT was the responsible body while single academies which were not in a MAT were their own responsible body. She advised that all responsible bodies had been required to complete a survey about suspected RAAC within their school buildings. She reported that the Council had completed surveys for the 71 schools which it was the responsible body for early in 2023. She advised that she was aware that the Dioceses had completed the surveys for schools they were responsible for but that the Council had not yet been informed whether surveys had been completed for all the academies in Manchester, despite being in a position to help any who needed assistance. She reported that the DfE was reviewing surveys which were received and, where there was suspected RAAC, a specialist surveyor was being sent to inspect the building. She advised that where there was a confirmed presence of RAAC within a school building, the DfE was advising the schools to close off that part of the school and was allocating a caseworker to the school. She reported that there was no indication that there was RAAC within any of the schools for which the Council was the responsible body.

The Chair advised that the scrapping of the Building Schools for the Future Programme in 2010 had led to this problem.

Councillor Flanagan, Ward Councillor for Miles Platting and Newton Heath, expressed concern that there had been a failure of leadership from the Government on this issue, advising that it was not realistic to expect headteachers to identify RAAC and that every school, including private schools, should have been surveyed by a building inspector. He praised the response of Council officers, the Executive Member and the headteacher to the RAAC issue at All Saints Primary School and advised that everyone needed to work together to support affected schools. He called on Committee Members to lobby the Chancellor of Exchequer to change taxation laws so that top private schools, such as Eton, did not attract charitable status and advised that the additional funding from this should be spent on addressing the RAAC issue and that affected schools should be charged lower business rates. He advised Members that the Government should be instructing councils to inspect every building, noting that RAAC was used in a range of public buildings, and that the Government needed to provide extra funding to support this work.

Councillor Hitchen, Ward Councillor for Miles Platting and Newton Heath, thanked the Executive Member and Council officers within the Education Service, as well as the headteacher and staff of All Saints Primary School for their work to ensure that the pupils were able to return to school with as little disruption as possible. She reported that her ward was one of the most deprived wards in the city and the pandemic had had a negative impact on the children so she welcomed the work to support the children and ensure they could continue their education. She criticised the DfE for spending £34 million on refurbishing its offices, for school closures and reductions in spending on school maintenance. She supported Councillor Flanagan's comments about tax breaks for private schools and the need to inspect other public buildings.

The Chair commented that she was putting the Committee's Representative of the Diocese of Manchester, which was the Diocese responsible for All Saints Primary School, in touch with the Ward Councillors.

The Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People reported that Corporate Property were now undertaking an exercise to look at all Council buildings to ascertain whether any were affected by RAAC. He emphasised that the Council was totally committed to addressing the issue of RAAC in schools, including providing assistance to any academies who required it.

In response to a Member's question about secondary schools, the Director of Education reported that a lot of Manchester secondary schools were part of one of the Dioceses and the Council knew that surveys had been completed in relation to these schools but did not know whether surveys had been completed in relation to secondary schools which were academies. She reported, while schools affected by RAAC would be provided with a DfE caseworker and a specialist structural survey, it was not yet clear what longer term help would be provided by central Government.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Education reported that it was too early to tell whether attendance levels had been affected by parents worrying about sending their children back to school due to RAAC but that this would be monitored. In response to a question about communication, she explained how the Council, including the Communications Team and Press Office, worked with all types of schools on communicating information to parents, as well as on dealing with the media.

The Chair advised that most of the city's Sure Start buildings had had their roofs replaced as part of planned maintenance but she expressed concern that a range of public buildings could be affected by RAAC. She highlighted some of the questions trade unions had put to the Secretary of State for Education in relation to the Government's response to RAAC in schools and advised that the Committee would be revisiting this issue.

Decision

That the Committee will receive an update on this at a future meeting.

CYP/23/35 Minutes

Decisions

1. To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2023.
2. To receive the minutes of the meetings of the Ofsted Subgroup held on 14 June 2023 and 26 July 2023.

CYP/23/36 School Places

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which provided an overview of Manchester's current school age population and the numbers forecast for future academic years. It also detailed work previously undertaken to create additional school places to ensure Manchester met its sufficiency duty. The report showed that demand for school places continued to

increase and outlined the work that was planned to achieve sufficiency of places across the city in response to this continued growth.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- The school age population;
- Approach to securing sufficient school places; and
- Actions to secure sufficient school places in the primary phase, secondary phase and special schools.

The Head of Access and Sufficiency advised that, since the report had been published, two further schools had been secured for the city through the Free Schools Programme, one at post-16 and one at the secondary phase.

Some of the key points and themes that arose from the Committee's discussions were:

- Special school places and resourced provision within mainstream schools;
- Sixth form provision;
- Did planning for school places take into account children crossing local authority boundaries to attend school; and
- The increase in children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND).

The Head of Access and Sufficiency reported that it was planned to have a mixed offer for additional specialist places including further expansion of special schools and specialist units within mainstream schools, which enabled children to remain at the local school that they were originally allocated while accessing additional support and an adapted curriculum. She confirmed that children attending schools outside their local authority area were taken into account in her service's planning and forecasting and that information was shared between Greater Manchester local authorities. She reported that previously a significant number of Manchester children had attended schools outside of the city's boundaries, particularly at the secondary phase, but that more recently Manchester children were choosing to stay within the city for secondary school, which meant there were fewer places at Manchester schools available for children living outside of the city. In response to a Member's question, she confirmed that, if a family moved house during the academic year, they could apply for a school place from their new address, although in some circumstances it might be better for the child to remain at their existing school. She advised that, if there were no vacancies at their preferred schools, the Admissions Team would work with the family to identify a suitable school which was closer to their new home.

In response to a Member's questions about children who did not receive a place at one of their preferred schools, the Head of Access and Sufficiency reported that they would be allocated a place at the closest school with a vacancy and, depending on the distance, would be offered free travel. She reported that in some cases the Council had worked with particular schools on trying to transport children in groups so that they were not travelling alone to schools in different areas of the city. She

outlined work to create more school places in areas where there was pressure on school places, particularly in south Manchester and Wythenshawe.

The Director of Education reported that post-16 education was now at capacity and more places would be needed in future years and she outlined some of the work taking place to increase capacity, including working with sixth form providers to expand their provision, encouraging providers to apply to open additional post-16 provision through the Free School Process and conversations with the DfE about the allocation of capital funding. She also informed Members about ongoing discussions with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and the DfE about post-16 technical pathways.

The Executive Member for Early Years, Children and Young People suggested that the Committee receive a separate report on post-16 provision at a future meeting. He praised how Council departments had worked together to provide additional school places during a period of significant population growth, when there was a shortage of available land and the Council did not have direct control over schools.

The Director of Education reported that the number of children with SEND had risen nationally and that Manchester had been asked by the DfE to lead for the north-west region on work in relation to SEND and early intervention. She highlighted the impact of the pandemic on children's development and mental health. A Member commented on the impact of poverty on children's development.

The Chair reported that the decline in the birth rate could mean that there would be less demand for primary school places, while recognising that there was a degree of uncertainty about future numbers due to families moving into the city, and that campuses which accommodated children from 3 to 19 would make it easier to manage fluctuating year group sizes. She also highlighted the impact of the planned expansion of free childcare.

The Head of Access and Sufficiency advised that, while the birth rate had gone down, by Key Stage 2 numbers had recovered in some schools, due to in-year migration, so it was difficult to reduce capacity as it was likely to be needed later. She reported that her service was monitoring the situation and working with schools in relation to this but, at present, it was not planned to reduce capacity in primary schools. She also highlighted that the regeneration projects taking place across the city were likely to bring more families into the city in future. The Chair highlighted the importance of ensuring there were sufficient amenities when new housing was built.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Director of Education reported that the number of children being Electively Home Educated (EHE) had risen during the pandemic and had not returned to pre-pandemic levels but was no longer continuing to rise. She informed the Committee that work was taking place to ascertain whether there was sufficiency in the childcare sector in the city to accommodate the expansion of free childcare. In response to a comment from the Chair about one-form-entry Roman Catholic primary schools in north Manchester, she reported that her service was working with the Diocese of Salford. She reported that her service and the Diocese were also involved in the discussions about large-scale housing developments such as Victoria North.

Decision

To receive an update report later in the year.

CYP/23/37 School Attendance in 2022 / 2023

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which provided a summary of attendance data in Manchester for the academic year 2022/2023. It also reviewed some of the activity that had taken place over the course of the last academic year and outlined the strategic approach for 2023/2024 for Committee Members.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- National context;
- Attendance data overview in 2022/2023;
- Overview of attendance work in 2022/2023; and
- Strategic approach 2023/2024.

A Member expressed concern that Wythenshawe had worse school attendance than other areas of the city and asked what the Council and local Councillors could do to address this. The Statutory Lead for Attendance and Exclusions reported that his team had worked with a number of schools in Wythenshawe through the Targeted Support Meetings pilot and this had resulted in improved attendance levels in those schools. He advised that he was confident that when Targeted Support Meetings were rolled out to other schools in Wythenshawe, this would result in further improvements. The Director of Education advised that Ward Councillors could help through their role, for example, asking why a child was not in school or routinely asking about children's schooling when families approached them for help and she outlined some of the support families could access if they were struggling to get their child to school on time, through Early Help Hubs or the school. She reported that school attendance was looked at through the school quality assurance process and, where needed, schools could be invited to attend a Support and Challenge meeting to discuss this.

In response to Members' questions about Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN), the Statutory Lead for Attendance and Exclusions reported that these were requested by the individual school so there was variation in their use across the city, with some schools using it as early intervention and some using it as a last resort, although there were plans to provide more challenge to schools on their processes before issuing an FPN. He informed the Committee that 75% of FPNs were issued due to families taking holidays in term-time, with most of the rest being due to persistent absence.

The Chair highlighted that the groups with the lowest attendance levels were White Travellers of Irish Heritage and White Gypsy/Roma and asked what work was taking place to address this. The Statutory Lead for Attendance and Exclusions reported that the Council produced a model attendance policy for schools which included an appendix with guidance in relation to these groups and that Targeted Support

Meetings with schools could be used to formulate a strategy for improving the attendance of individual pupils.

The Chair advised that Ward Councillors in areas with the lowest attendance levels should be informed of this. She supported the development of a strategy to improve attendance levels for White Travellers of Irish Heritage and White Gypsy/Roma children.

Decisions

1. To note the progress made on school attendance in 2022/2023.
2. To approve the strategic approach for 2023/2024 which both meets the DfE non statutory requirements and improves support to schools.
3. To approve the strategic approach for 2023/2024 which looks to build a partnership consensus around attendance so that a multi-disciplinary approach is embedded across Children's Services and wider agencies.
4. To support the building of a 'think attendance' approach into Members' ward level activity so that attendance at school is encouraged and promoted with all residents.
5. To support the development of a strategy to improve attendance levels for White Travellers of Irish Heritage and White Gypsy/Roma children.

CYP/23/38 Manchester Inclusion Strategy Update

The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director of Children and Education Services which provided an update on the implementation of Manchester's Inclusion Strategy 2022-2025 and an overview of the key priorities and next steps.

Key points and themes in the report included:

- Manchester Inclusion Strategy activity since July 2022;
- What was known about inclusion across the city; and
- Priority Inclusion Strategy activity for 2023-24.

The Director of Education offered to share a link to the Inclusion Strategy toolkit with Members of the Committee.

A Member welcomed the positive report and that so many schools in Manchester were becoming Rights Respecting Schools.

The Chair asked what was being done in relation to schools which had higher levels of exclusions than others. The Director of Education reported that exclusion and suspension data was monitored and, if a school was an outlier, they would be invited to a Support and Challenge meeting to understand the reasons for the higher number of exclusions and identify a way to work with the school to improve that.

Decision

To note the report.

CYP/23/39 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.

The Chair encouraged more Members to join the Ofsted Subgroup. She informed Members about the forthcoming visit to Wetherby Young Offenders Institution and stated that the Committee would receive a report on Youth Justice at a future meeting. In response to a Member's comments about an incident of anti-social behaviour by young people in the city centre and what was being done to prevent this from happening again, the Chair stated that she would discuss with the Chair of the Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee which Committee should consider this issue.

Decision

To note the report and agree the work programme, subject to the above comments.