

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 11TH NOVEMBER, 2020

A MEETING of the CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the VIRTUAL MEETING THROUGH MICROSOFT TEAMS, DONCASTER on WEDNESDAY, 11TH NOVEMBER, 2020 at 4.30 PM

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Neil Gethin

Councillors John Gilliver, Nick Allen, Linda Curran, George Derx, Susan Durant, Frank Tyas and Sue Wilkinson

Co-optees – Bernadette Nesbit (Diocese of hallam Roman Catholic Church)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Leanne Hornsby, Assistant Director Education, Skills, Culture and Heritage
Lee Golze, Assistant Director, Early Intervention and Localities
Paul Ruane, Head of Learning Provision
Neil McAlister, Learning Provision Organisation

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tina Reid and John Hoare, Co-optee (Dioceses of Sheffield Church of England)

		<u>ACTION</u>
1	<u>TO CONSIDER THE EXTENT, IF ANY, TO WHICH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS ARE TO BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING.</u>	
	None.	
2	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u>	
	There were no declarations made.	
3	<u>MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17TH SEPTEMBER 2020</u>	
	That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 th September, 2020 were agreed as a correct record.	
4	<u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS</u>	

	There were no public statements made.	
5	<u>ORGANISATION OF LEARNING PROVISION STRATEGY 2020</u>	
	<p>The Assistant Director for Education, Skills, Culture and Heritage provided an overview of the Organisation of Learning Provision Strategy 2020 that sets the future learning landscape for Doncaster. It was explained that the report addressed ensuring the right number of school places, in the correct locations were available across Doncaster and place projections moving forward.</p> <p>The following areas were addressed in detail by the Panel:</p> <p><u>Local Authority influence on Academy Trusts</u> – A Member referred to the changing pattern in Doncaster meaning that there were a number of schools where the governing body was increasingly autonomous with regard to pupil places and admissions policies and questioned what influence the Local Authority had in this regard. In response, it was explained that in Doncaster there was considerable collaboration and good relationships between the Borough’s schools and the Local Authority, with the response to Covid-19 highlighting such positive connections.</p> <p>Members were reminded that Academies by definition were independent in their own right, however, the Local Authority retained certain statutory responsibilities, particularly with regards to safeguarding. The Local Authority was effectively the Commissioner to ensure appropriate and sufficient school places were available across the board.</p> <p><u>Funding for school repairs</u> – in response to a question raised, it was explained that an annual review was undertaken on each school to prioritise refurbishment work funded from the capital condition funding allocation, available for community schools. With regard to voluntary aided schools, it was confirmed they had their own budgets for this purpose and Academies were required to make an annual bid for refurbishment works.</p> <p><u>Capital Funds for expansion</u> – It was explained that a programme of expansion works was undertaken through a number of funding opportunities available. This included applications through the annual allocation, Section 106 fund and more recently funding streams that were made available, for example, to build the new Bader SEND school that had been fully funded by the Department for Education and sponsored by the NEXUS Academy Trust.</p> <p><u>Bader SEND school</u> – The Strategy identified that there was a demand for places in SEND schools. It was confirmed that the Local Authority had the responsibility to provide sufficient places that met the needs all off children with individual needs. Reference was made to the New</p>	

Bader school, opening on 1st September, 2020 and provided places for children with social emotional mental health support. The school was based in the Edenthorpe area and provided 100 places for children with high functioning autism.

Growth demand of school places – specifically relating to special needs provision, it was questioned whether there was adequate capacity as the gap between this and the actual number was narrowing each year. It was the opinion that alternative provision when a child transferred from a normal to special school, provision had not always been adequate. It was explained that the document provided addressed learning provision and not school organisation, it took into account both SEND provision and children who required additional support.

It was explained that as part of the inclusion work the breach relating to reintegration was being addressed and had gained greater pace as a result of the Covid pandemic. An example of this was the reframing and reprofiling of “Big Picture Doncaster”.

In response to a question relating to the need for further schools like the new Bader school, it was explained that a SEND sufficiency plan was being developed and an item that the Panel could address at a future meeting.

The Panel was informed that the children on role at Heatherwood school was 71 and not 123 as set out in the report.

Asbestos removal – it was confirmed that asbestos only created a problem if disturbed and its removal from school buildings was managed on a case by case basis. For example, if planned works identified that asbestos was an issue, then the school concerned would be supported and measures taken for its automatic removal. With regard to specific questions relating to ceiling tiles, it was explained that this would be followed up after the meeting.

Section 106 monies - school build programme – Members noted that the Planning White Paper consultation proposed that a Community Infrastructure Levy would replace the Section 106 process and provided on an area by area basis. The number of additional school places required on any new build would be calculated with building developers required to contribute to this.

School transport and the demand for and growth of faith schools – In response to questions in relation to the number of pupils able to access their chosen faith school, the difficulties that could arise with travel arrangements, including the need for parents to use cars if their child lived outside the school locality, thus increasing traffic, the following was addressed.

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide transport if:

a child is 3 or more miles away from their nearest secondary school, a child of 8 years and under and is 2 miles or more walking distance away from a school.

The Transport Policy was based on mileage parameters however, Members were reminded that parents had the right to appeal under the Policy if they were unhappy with the transport support allocated. This could be undertaken if parents were able to demonstrate that a particular school provided the environment and learning that was specific to the needs of their child, with a faith school being one example. With regards to admissions and transport assistance the Policy was being addressed moving forward, including engagement with South Yorkshire Transport, but recognised that any proposed changes would not happen immediately.

The acknowledgement of SACRE's involvement (Standing Advisory council for Religious Education) was very important when giving consideration to this issue.

School admissions – the Local Authority co-ordinated the admissions for a number of schools, however, it was noted that schools were Admission authorities in their own right. It was accepted that Doncaster had a multi-faceted structure with a number of Academies and Voluntary Aided Schools and it was important that everyone worked together to ensure sufficient places were available in the right areas. It was acknowledged that there were some areas that had a high demand for or surplus school places across the Borough but patterns of preference changed over time, and work was ongoing through the School Provision Strategy to address this.

It was recognised that historically oversubscribed schools were expanded and undersubscribed schools could fall victim to that position if they were in the same vicinity. Standards across Doncaster were generally improving and in turn so were schools' reputations, therefore if a school wished to expand, then it would be addressed in the context of all schools within the vicinity to ensure schools were not oversubscribed at the detriment to others.

A number of schools with surplus places were highlighted but it was noted that in the East of the Borough there was currently sufficient school places. However, the DN7 development would see an increase in the number of properties and in turn would increase demand in the Stainforth, Thorne and Hatfield areas. It was noted that discussions had been undertaken with the developer to secure S106 monies for additional school provision.

RESOLVED: that the report, be noted.

REPORT

NOTE: At this point the Chair, Councillor Gethin left the meeting and Councillor Gilliver, Vice-Chair assumed the Chair.

The Assistant Director for Education, Skills, Culture and Heritage presented the report outlining developments in Education and Skills during the initial lockdown phase of Covid-19 and the joint effort provided by the Local Authority, schools and partners.

The Panel noted that during this time Doncaster for the first time was able to publish the complete pathway of transitions online across all provisions, early years into infants, infants into junior, then into secondary and post-16. The work undertaken on the welfare of children was also highlighted, including welfare calls which could not have been achieved effectively without all partners working together. Members acknowledged that there had been very innovative practices established during the Covid-19 lockdown period during the spring and summer months.

NOTE: At this point Councillor Gethin re-joined the meeting and assumed the Chair.

Members highlighted that they appreciated the innovative work, co-ordination and development required to provide a place based education approach between March and July 2020, reopening of schools in September and resetting education priorities.

The Co-optee representing the Catholic Diocese and on behalf of school headteachers outlined her thanks to the Local Authority for the exceptional support to schools, following the initial National lockdown in March and subsequent work undertaken since.

The following areas were addressed by the Panel, in detail:

Elective Home Education (EHE) – the Panel learnt that numbers had increased quickly, in line with the national trend, but was pleased to note that engagement with parents was being undertaken to ensure the curriculum requirements and quality of teaching were being addressed. Concern was highlighted that some children being home educated may be finding it hard to keep up with the curriculum and not receiving support from their school.

The difference between genuine EHE and the anxiety faced by some parents of children returning to school was accepted, and the work being undertaken by schools and Public Health in promoting schools as a safe place and Covid compliant, was welcomed. It was acknowledged that it was important to capture parental perceptions in relation to how safety and Covid bubbles were being managed.

Hard to reach families – Members acknowledged the continuing partnership approach being undertaken to address this issue. With regard to school specific concerns it was explained that the Welfare group was continuing to undertake personal visits and phone calls.

With regard to areas of significant pockets of EHE children, concern was expressed that in these areas, plugging the knowledge gap would have a significant impact on some schools that may have high numbers, when children started to return to class. It was stressed that having evidence of this nature could assist schools moving forward, particularly with evidencing attendance figures. Members noted that this was an area that could be forensically addressed to support the wider welfare provision that may be required, and acknowledged that this would be a unique set of data to collate and use for policy development. It was stressed that understanding the wider specific needs of some families, through the localities model, was imperative before a support package could be provided to families.

The Young advisor outlined that young people were finding the lockdown position quite stressful, understanding the position and requirement for Covid bubbles, but their concern was not as high as the concern expressed by their parents and the older population.

Early years provision – Members' concern with regard to early years developmental and emotional skills, being a priority particularly for the most vulnerable, were accepted. The Panel was pleased to note that family hubs had remained open and strong throughout the Covid pandemic with good attendance being recorded. The extensive virtual offer and supplementary face to face mother and baby sessions were highlighted as a good example of the continued support available.

With regard to the early years children entering school it was accepted that they need socialisation and the current pandemic had brought this to the fore, so when children were starting school or being reintegrated, emotional skills were a priority.

School attendance – Members were pleased to note that school attendance rates in September matched the national average of 92 - 93%. Unfortunately in the week prior to half term it was learnt that a number of school Covid bubbles in secondary schools had to isolate but since returning attendance figures had greatly improved.

With regard to the attendance administration required by schools, it was acknowledged that figures were being reported to the Department of Education daily along with reporting Covid cases to the Local Authority. The Panel paid tribute to all schools for undertaking a phenomenal job throughout the whole Covid period whilst working under such difficult circumstances.

It was also noted that the Local Authority persistent absence strategies

established prior to the Covid pandemic, had assisted with the reduction in persistent absence figures, but only due to the hard work being undertaken by colleagues in the school system.

Examinations 2021 and Catch up premium – the Panel heard from a Young Advisor about how young people reacted to studying the curriculum and examinations in the initial lockdown period. Members also learnt about the hard work and mechanisms put in place by schools and the Local Authority across the Borough to ensure young people continued to achieve their education and examination result goals. The Panel therefore proposed that the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools lobby the Department of Education on the following areas:-

Possible cancellation of exams in 2021 and cancellation of Primary School assessments - After the announcement by the Welsh Government that examinations for 2021 would be cancelled with results based on classroom assessments, the Panel was of the opinion that the same path could be taken by Central Government for English schools. Members appreciated the hard work and support that had been provided for young people taking their GCSE's and 'A' levels in 2020 but wished to press the Department for Education for an early decision, if this proposal was being considered. Additionally it was requested if consideration could also be given to an early decision on whether all primary assessments would be cancelled, as was the case in 2020.

Catch up premium funding (one off 2021 academic year support for pupils to make up for lost teaching time) – clarity was required on whether an extension would be provided to spend this funding allocation. It was noted that some children were currently not in school, for example, isolating as part of a Covid-19 school bubble or opting for elective home education and were missing out on interventions. The Panel feared that the Borough's most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups would be hardest hit.

NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) – it was acknowledged that there had been a lot of success stories, and noted that this was due to the active engagement with young people, employers and education providers by the Participation and Transition Service. It was also highlighted that the young people in Doncaster sought opportunities and was encouraging to see.

RESOLVED That:

1. The report be noted; and
2. The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools be requested to lobby the Department of Education on the following areas for the reasons set out above:-

	<p>A) Possible cancellation of exams in 2021 and cancellation of Primary School assessments; and</p> <p>B) Catch up premium funding (one off 2021 academic year support for pupils to make up for lost teaching time).</p>	
7	<p><u>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN AND COUNCIL'S FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS</u></p>	
	<p>The Senior Governance Officer presented the Overview and Scrutiny work Plan and Council's Forward Plan of key decisions.</p> <p>Following discussion undertaken as part of the item on the Organisation of Learning Provision Strategy, it was agreed that Alternative Provision be added as a topic to the 2021/2022 work plan.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u> that the report be noted and Alternative Provision be detailed on the 2021/2022 work plan.</p>	