

# Minutes of Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

**Monday 6 January 2025 at 6.00pm  
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

**Present:** Councillor Hinchliff (Chair).  
Councillors Ashraf, Choudhry, Haq, Khan and Kordala.  
Co-opted member - Barrie Scott (Church of England Representative).

**Officers:** Sally Giles (Director of Children and Education Services); Julie Andrews (Assistant Director for Education Services); Mandip Chahal (Interim Assistant Director Commissioning, Partnerships and Improvement); Kelly Harris (Skills and Employment Service Manager); Tariq Karim (Youth Services Manager); Dawn Maleki (Youth Services Manager); and Connor Robinson (Democratic Services Officer).

## 1/25 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence or were received from Councillors Mayo and Pall. An apology of absence was also received from co-opted member Katherine Parks.

## 2/25 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## 3/25 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2024 are approved as a correct record.

4/25

## **Urgent Additional Items of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

5/25

## **Corporate Parenting Post 16 Opportunities**

The Board considered the post-16 opportunities for those children and young people who were care experienced. There was a targeted focus on the performance of education, employment and training for 19–21-year-olds who were care experienced young people. Education, employment and training performance for 19–21-year-olds was 45.5% in December 2024, an improvement of 3.8% from 2023 and an achievement of the corporate target set for 2024. This however, remained below the national average by 16.5%. This was a key priority for the Sandwell Corporate Parenting Board and actions were being implemented and monitored by the Education, Employment and Training Strategy group.

Collectively, Sandwell Children’s Trust and the Council were supporting the looked after and care experienced young people into education, employment and training destinations. The Education, Employment and Training Strategy group had oversight over the key actions in place aiming to improve education, employment and training performance in Sandwell. It was evident that improvements were being made and outcomes were being realised as the percentage of those in education, employment and training at 16-24 had improved by 7.5% on last year and was 15.2% higher performance than 2022.

The process of getting care experienced young people into education, employment, and training could be lengthy and challenging due to several interrelated factors. Trauma, mental health issues, educational gaps, housing insecurity and financial barriers contributed to prevent care experienced young people from progressing to education, employment and training. Care experienced young people at the age of 18/19 were often at a transitional period of their lives which could create insecurity and exacerbate barriers. Often mental health and trauma of their lives in care needed to be addressed prior to the young people being able to explore employment and training pathways. Additionally, secure housing needed to be in place before education, employment and training options could be considered. Financial barriers could also prevent progression to education, employment and training due to the affordability of destinations including University and

apprenticeships which could leave care experienced young people worse off financially.

The academic achievement of the children cared for was above the national achievement levels for care experienced young people at Key Stage 4 but was lower than the Sandwell average for all children in this age group.

The most popular education, employment and training destination was full time education at 34%, with 8% going into higher education and 3% into apprenticeships. The numbers entering apprenticeships was increasing, with 8 in November 2023 up to 14 November 2024.

The education, employment and training panel was used to refer young people to the Multi Agency team to determine the package of support to progress them to education, employment and training. The education, employment and training panel consisted of Sandwell Childrens Trust, Connexions, Employment and Skills and the Virtual School. The package of support was tailored to the individual and could involve multiple teams.

Sandwell Children's Trust Personal Advisors encouraged those with care experience to take up education, employment and training opportunities. Personal Advisors were kept up to date with opportunities available via Connexions and the Employment and Skills team.

Connexions offered a careers advice and guidance service for care experienced young people from year 8 onwards. The service aimed to ensure destinations were in place at the age of 18 to prevent the potential of them becoming not in education, employment and training in the future. Aspire to Higher Education was facilitated by Connexions in Sandwell and was offered to inspire the young people and to expand their knowledge of Higher education as a future destination. This was offered at year 8 and year 11 and was delivered in partnership with a local University.

The Council's Employment and Skills team provided dedicated job search sessions for care experienced young people in which they receive support in looking for opportunities and the application process. These sessions had proved invaluable in building the trust of the young people and improving confidence.

Care experienced young people were offered apprenticeship opportunities within the Council that were generated to match their

individual aspirations through 'ring fenced' vacancies. These were made accessible by a relaxation of the Maths and English requirements and by an individualised application process. There was also funding to provide paid work placements for care experienced young people utilising funding from the Commonwealth Games legacy programme. Where an opportunity was matched to a young person, working with an advisor, they could access a period of work experience, and receive support to complete the application form and undergo an informal interview. Currently, there were six care experienced young people on apprenticeships in the Council and Sandwell Schools. There were a further three undertaking work experience looking to progress into an apprenticeship.

A deep dive was conducted in January 2024 into the education, employment and training offer for care experienced young people. As part of the deep dive the barriers to progressing into education, employment and training were explored. Further exploration had taken place by the education, employment and training strategy group of the reasons for the drop in education, employment and training in the 19 plus age group.

Care Experienced young people post 19 were in a transitional period of their lives. This may be the first time they live independently, and they may move to a location unfamiliar to them. Sandwell Childrens Trust were working to ensure a more seamless transition to prevent the potential of becoming not in education, employment and training due to this instability. Projects such as the House Project and Live and Work scheme, and the close working arrangements with Housing Management were enabling a successful transition.

The Forum for Independent Adults had been integral in acting as ambassadors for education, employment and training with their peers. They had attended the Youth Employment Summit, conferences with employers and recorded videos of their experiences.

The education, employment and training strategy group and education subgroups were being merged to form the Education and Employment and Training Group. This group would be responsible for monitoring the academic achievement and aspiration of care experienced young people including not in education, employment and training prevention activities from year 7 onwards.

A key focus of the Councils plan of action going forward was focussing on transition points at years 11-13 to ensure education, employment and training pathways were in place for the Children we Care for to prevent not in education, employment and training at post 19.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were provided and issues highlighted:-

- the Council worked hard to ensure its engagement with young people was personal and provided for their needs, it was important that the service was not overly corporate and service providers recognised the experience of the young people accessing the service;
- engagement with the service was voluntary and some young people chose not to engage or only engage after a number of years, often the lack of engagement was attributed to their age;
- Banardo's was commissioned by the Council and Sandwell Children's Trust to work with care experienced young people and support them in their emotional wellbeing and mental health;
- many young people on turning 18 wish to disengage from the service which was natural for some young people after leaving care;
- many young people may wish to focus on issues such as housing and building their independence before they focus on higher education or career growth;
- in the 19-21 bracket there was a disengagement in Sandwell which was below the national trends, this had been identified and work was underway to understand the discrepancy and ensure the support was there to enable care experienced young people to engage with services when necessary;
- the Council did not record whether someone applying for a job at the Council was care experienced, with the introduction of care experience as a protected characteristic this would be recorded;
- lack of engagement with service provision was attributed to many young people not receiving support, work was underway to understand how to market to young people who are care experienced;
- all young people leaving care were appointed a personal advisor to support them in their transition to independent living, each young person had an individual plan to support them in their transition.

## Statutory Youth Offer in Sandwell

The Board considered the Statutory Youth Offer in Sandwell. Sandwell had a statutory duty to provide access to youth work services that meet the needs of young people. The guidance around the statutory duty had been reviewed and strengthened around the 'musts' of the provision which included:

- mapping of youth provision;
- needs assessments;
- engagement with young people to meet their needs;
- sufficient levels of activities and facilities to meet needs; and
- promoting the local youth offer.

Work undertaken by youth workers with young people was based on the relationship of trust and confidence which can transform what was possible for young people. Involvement between youth workers and young people was always voluntary and the young person always chose to engage.

Within Sandwell the offer was predicated on three principals:

- somewhere safe and welcoming to go;
- something positive to do; and
- someone trusted to talk to

Staffing levels across the youth service was 26.7 full time equivalent staff, 49 staff were Level 2 Youth Work Qualified, 24 were Level 3 Youth Work qualified and 8 were JNC Qualified. There were a number of volunteers across the service, there were 24 active volunteers and six volunteers had gone on to secure employment.

The service worked with young people aged between 11-19, and up to 25 for those with SEND. In 2023 - 2024 the service had 25,262 contacts with children and young people through 2,807 sessions.

The youth offer across the six towns provided a mix of universal and targeted provision and youth workers addressed some of the key issues affecting young people. In Sandwell the offer was delivered through both a town-based and targeted approach. The town-based offer included a youth club/ youth facility in each town (two in West Bromwich), delivered in partnership through a range of facilities including libraries, museums and community centres, including some where the Council pay to hire the facilities. In addition, the Council delivered two detached youth work teams complemented by youth bus sessions in each town. Two Senior Youth Officers, responsible for three towns each managed this provision and had

strengthened the imbedding of the Service in partnership working in each town.

The two detached teams that worked across each town operated in anti-social behaviour hotspot areas as determined by town tasking. Youth Bus sessions supported the delivery of youth work, open access youth provision where there was a lack of facilities and key events. Youth workers also supported with Violence Reduction Plans and Safeguarding Days along with Cost-of-Living Life Skills Programme. Partnership work was also an aspect of the offer with youth officers attending town-based meetings, working with a range of partners around issues and needs of young people.

Emerging needs of young people that continued to be presented and support offered related to mental and physical health and wellbeing, the ongoing impact of the cost-of-living crisis and young people feeling unsafe in their community.

There was a growing body of evidence nationally of the impact and benefit of youth work on young people and society. A report by UK Youth and Frontier Economics estimated that ‘the return on investment’ for youth work could be considered ‘high’ to ‘very high’. This meant that for every pound the government invested in the youth sector, it generated between £3.20 and £6.40 in benefits to the taxpayer.’ The Institute for Fiscal Studies report had found that austerity-induced youth club closures in London meant young people performed 4% worse in exams at age 16 and became 14% more likely to commit crimes. The Local Government Association reported 42% of local authority areas were looking to invest in youth work hours and support over next three years. It had been noted that vulnerable young people were the most likely to attend youth clubs.

National developments across the sector included a Government commitment to a National Youth Strategy that would prioritise delivering better coordinated youth services and policy at a local, regional and national level. The introduction of a Young Futures Programme aimed to tackle knife crime and address rising mental health issues among young people.

The current youth offer provided an appropriate balance between universal and targeted support. It remained however, a limited resource and could find itself stretched between open access and targeted activity.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were provided and issues highlighted:-

- work had been undertaken to co-locate aspects of the youth offer in Family Hubs across Sandwell, the partnership allowed for a more joined up approach;
- mapping across the Sandwell six towns allowed for a detailed understanding of the provision available;
- children and young people worked with the service to co-design action plans which detailed the activities undertaken in the youth sessions;
- work was undertaken to ensure venues for the youth activities were appropriate but sometimes it was necessary to ensure what was planned was appropriate for the spaces being used;
- the youth bus was co-designed with young people to be a space where they felt welcome;
- the service worked with the Parks Team to co-design projects aimed at young people;
- the service worked with agencies across the health and wellbeing sector to provide support and advice to young people where necessary;
- the service worked with Police to identify areas with anti-social behaviour and target those communities with engagement and support;
- it was recognised that youth team support did have a measurable impact on reducing anti-social behaviour issues;
- the youth service regularly met with Police representatives, along with working in collaboration with them where appropriate;
- the budget for the service was just over £1 million, with around £240k generated by the service;
- the funding for the service had remained steady over the preceding five years;
- funding was distributed across the six towns equitably, the youth bus would be used to target areas when required;
- the youth bus programme was available online along with a programme of activities;
- the biggest issues relating to the youth bus was the availability of drivers;
- some of the venues lack of wifi was off-putting to young people, efforts were made to address this;
- it was often the most vulnerable children and young people who attended the youth clubs;
- the youth service had contributed to de-escalation of youth violence through targeted support and intervention;
- the service that Sandwell provided was know regionally and nationally to be effective and engaging, partners from Solihull



Council had approached Sandwell to understand its provision and its impact.

7/25

## **Education Services: Priority Education Investment Area Plan**

Further to Minute No. 32/23 (11 September 2023) the Board considered the Education Services Priority Education Investment Area Plan.

In February 2022, the Government announced that it would be delivering a package of measures in 55 Education Investment Areas to further drive school Improvement in England as part of the levelling up agenda. These were comprised of local authorities where educational outcomes at the end of both key stage 2 (KS2) and key stage 4 (KS4) were the weakest and others containing an Opportunity Area or areas previously identified for additional school improvement support.

There were 24 Education Investment Areas that were identified as Priority Education Investment Areas and had been in receipt of more intensive investment. Sandwell was one of these Priority Education Investment Areas and was allocated £2.9m in Local Needs Funding to support this initiative and deliver the agreed priorities and improvements within the life of the programme.

A Local Partnership Board was established to work with Sandwell. The role of the Local Partnership Board included helping to identify the main challenges to improving outcomes for children and young people, identifying a range of interventions to address these challenges, and helping to drive support and activity within the Priority Education Investment Areas. The Board had also contributed to the development of Sandwell's Local Needs Delivery Plan and supported the monitoring of progress towards the agreed criteria within it.

Sandwell's Local Needs Plan focuses on 3 themes:

- attainment in Maths: Improving the quality of maths provision across targeted schools (£1.20m estimated costing);
- attainment in English: Improving the teaching of literacy to ensure it was of good quality in all schools to enable learners to access the rest of the English curriculum and other subjects across both primary and secondary phases. (£1.10m estimated costing); and

- speech and language: development had suffered due to the pandemic, resulting in challenges in learning phonics at early years and KS1, which would have a long-term impact on KS2 attainment. (£0.60m estimated costing). It was anticipated that this strand would include a focus on SEND.

The improvement programme for KS2 and KS4 English was being delivered by Shireland Collegiate Multi Academy Trust in collaboration with Whole Education and their 'Words for All' programme. A total of 96 schools were currently participating (74 primary, 18 secondary, and 4 AP/Special).

The offer to schools included a range of training, networks and support activities to facilitate the development of reading, writing, oracy and literacy provision in schools across the borough at practitioner level and also the strategic leadership of English as a subject. These were fully funded and at no cost to participating schools.

Core areas of focus included:

- improving whole school delivery of Literacy, and specifically to improve the impact of the Foundation Subjects on Key Stage 2 SAT performance in Reading and Writing;
- improving whole school delivery of Literacy, specifically to improve the impact of the Foundation Subjects on GCSE performance in English Language and Literature;
- developing the leadership of both Literacy and the curriculum to improve the effectiveness of Literacy strategies across the whole curriculum.

Delivery partners report that the project continued to be well established across most school settings, with 90% of primary schools, 96% of secondary and 71% of other educational setting schools engaged. There had also been considerable collaboration and networking across all educational settings.

Support for phonics was being delivered by the English Hub and was fully funded. A key aim of phonics support was to share and develop best practice in relation to the teaching of early language, reading and phonics.

There were 12 primary schools accessing this offer. Core elements included:

- a 2-Day Audit of provision and practice, leading to a development plan for the school (14 schools);

- training and sessions to support the development of practice;
- intensive support days bespoke to identified partner schools delivered by literacy specialists who work with the school's reading leader, using the audit report to help make improvements to their reading provision (8 schools);
- coaching for staff in partner schools to improve their knowledge, skills, and confidence in delivering phonics lessons with their chosen systematic synthetic phonics scheme;
- funding to purchase resources where gaps had been identified in provision (£110,629 allocated to date).

The improvement programme for KS2 and KS4 mathematics was delivered by the Maths Hub. All training and support activities were fully funded and at no cost to participating schools.

A total of 28 schools had received targeted support (19 primary and 9 secondary). Core areas of support had included:

- Maths curriculum and assessment;
- Maths professional development;
- Maths pedagogy.

There were 10 primary schools which received targeted support in 2023/24, with 6 not requiring support into 2024/25. However, these schools continued to receive support via the Maths hub standard offer. Early unvalidated data indicated that all 10 schools showed an improvement in their end of KS2 SATs results in 2024. The remaining 4 schools would continue to receive intensive targeted support in 2024/25. An additional 9 schools had received intensive support for 2024/25.

The improvement programme for KS2 and KS4 was being delivered by Windsor Multi Academy Trust in collaboration with the Teach Like a Champion team. A total of 20 Sandwell schools were selected as focus schools following an expression of interest process (15 primary and 5 secondary) and 20 in Walsall. All training and support activities were fully funded and at no cost to participating schools in both boroughs.

The project focused on implementing evidence-based classroom frameworks for developing student metacognition and self-regulation, impacting on the overall quality of teaching and learning across the curriculum. Core activities included:

- remote and in-person training of school implementation teams to improve metacognition and self-regulation, impacting on student outcomes in KS2 and KS4 in English and maths;
- support with accurate diagnosis and evaluation by leaders of teaching and learning and teachers of student metacognition and self-regulation;
- follow-up visits to schools to develop practice in their settings;
- the development of UK experts to coach and lead metacognition and self-regulation developments in the focus schools and to provide sustained capacity beyond the life of the project.

The delivery partner reported that the project met or exceeded all progress measures in the summer term reporting period, including the development and delivery of the 2-day in-person training, 10 remote training modules, 2 video infrastructure support meetings, and multiple Steplab training sessions and follow-up sessions for schools.

A sample of 14 out of the total of 40 schools was carried out in June 2024, 86% showed strong evidence of implementation, and 43% showed significant improvement after just 3 months of training and development.

The improvement programme for KS2 and KS4 SEND strand was being delivered by Victoria Multi Academy Trust in partnership with the Whole Education.

A total of 82 schools participated (56 primary, 19 secondary, and 5 AP/ special). Of these, 19 had been selected as focus schools following (14 primary, 4 secondary and 1 AP /Special).

The project focused on sustained improved leadership of SEND across Sandwell schools. The full programme was open to all Sandwell schools. In addition, identified focus Schools receive an 'enhanced' programme which included in-reach/out-reach from Sandwell SEND experts. The seven key themes within the programme were:

- intent: vision and strategy for SEND.
- identification: with a focus on effective early identification;
- provision mapping: using data effectively to plan interventions;
- implementation: inclusive high quality/quality first teaching; curriculum;
- impact: outcomes for SEND learners;
- effective use of teaching assistants; and

- working with learners and families.

SEND leads were involved in local 'quad' collaborative networks, led by a local coach who facilitated half termly meetings. The focus was on supporting the implementation of action plans and sharing best practice.

Feedback from SENCOs showed growing confidence to meet the needs of children/young people with SEND at an organisation level and feedback from coaches and quad schools evidenced collaborative working developing across the region.

The national funding for the Priority Education Investment Area development programme was in place until the end of the 2024/25 financial year. Beyond that point, the local authority would need to consider how development could be sustained and how this could continue to be funded and delivered.

The local authority had a School Improvement Advisory Team. The team was continuing to develop their offer to schools. This included some capacity to lead on future development building on that established via the Priority Education Investment Area programme..

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were provided and issues highlighted:-

- the funding had enabled a good foundation to be developed, however, an extension to the programmes would be required to fully embed the progress made within the schools and attainment from the pupils;
- an expansion of the provisions would be more expansive, if more schools were brought on board this would require additional funding;
- co-production was a possibility to build on what had been achieved and ensure the results were embedded long-term;
- all maintained schools had access to the Council's Schools Improvement Team, maintained schools were entitled to three advisory visits a year, with additional days provided for those schools where required additional support;
- academy schools had the option of buying into the Schools Improvement Team service through a service level agreement;
- there were six full time staff within the Schools Improvement Team, members of the team were able to specialise in certain areas to provide targeted support to schools when if required, such as PSHE, SEND or secondary provision;

- support was also available for early years settings;
- the results from schools had not been validated yet and as such the impact of the Priority Education Investment Area funding and programme had not been fully calculated;
- the platform to deliver the programmes of support was not viable within the Council, and work undertaken had been done through partners in the academy sector;
- the improvement programme for KS2 and KS4 SEND had allowed the development of networks and best practice;
- the continuation of the programme was dependent on funding which may not be available in the future, the School Improvement Team had developed its range of skills and understanding to support schools going forward;
- Sandwell had a School Improvement Team whereas other local authorities do not, and this allowed intervention to ensure schools had the support when required;
- The service maintained a record of the schools who required support and target them to ensure attainment improves year on year.

#### 8/25 **Tracking and Monitoring of Scrutiny Recommendations**

The Board noted progress on actions and recommendations from previous meetings.

#### 9/25 **Cabinet Forward Plan**

The Board noted the Cabinet Forward Plan as it related to Children, Young People and Education.

#### 10/25 **Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board Work Programme 2024/25**

The Board noted the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board Work Programme 2024/25.

Meeting ended at 7.57pm

Contact: [democratic\\_services@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk)