

IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION
27th July, 2016

Present:- Councillor Clark (in the Chair); Councillors Allcock, Cooksey, Cusworth, Elliot, Hague, Rose, Marriott, Napper, Pitchley, Fenwick-Green and Short.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Bird, Jarvis and Senior and Joanna Jones (co-opted member).

11. MEL MEGGS

The Chair welcomed Mel Meggs, Deputy Strategic Director, Children and Young People's Services, to her first meeting of the Select Commission. Mel would be the Select Commission's Link Officer.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at the meeting.

13. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no members of the press or public present at the meeting.

14. COMMUNICATIONS

The Select Commission noted the resignation of co-opted member Mark Smith, Children's Voluntary Sector Consortium.

The Chair placed on record her thanks to Mark for his contributions to the work of the Select Commission.

It was noted that the issue of co-opted members was to be discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

15. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 29TH JUNE, 2016

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission held on 29th June, 2016, were considered.

Resolved:- That the minutes from the previous meeting be agreed as a correct record.

Arising from Minute No. 6 (Children and Young People's Services – The Improvement Journey), it was noted that the Select Commission would be keeping a watching brief on the number of Rotherham children and young people being sent to out-of-authority provision.

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Arising from Minute No. 9 (Improving Lives Select Commission Work Programme), clarity was sought as to what was to happen to those children who should be attending the Flanderwell Autism Centre. The relevant Director would be contacted for an answer.

16. **PROPOSAL TO INCREASE SECONDARY SCHOOL CAPACITY ACROSS THE BOROUGH TO MEET FUTURE INCREASED DEMAND**

Dean Fenton, Service Lead School Planning, Admissions and Appeals, presented a report that had been considered at the Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision Making meeting held on 11th July, 2016 (Minute No. 48 refers).

Following the expansion of several primary schools within the Borough, additional primary phase pupils would eventually add additional pressure to secondary school capacity. The Cabinet and Commissioner's approval had been sought for a programme of secondary school expansion projects to meet future rising cohort numbers:-

Wales High
St. Bernard's
Wath Comprehensive
St. Pius
Oakwood High
Aston Academy

Preliminary discussions had taken place with the Head Teachers of some of the identified schools. Further consultation would be required with Governors, parents/carers and staff in relation to the proposed building work and potential health and safety implications on site and how they would be managed.

The estimated cost of the individual projects to increase teaching and learning space in the schools/academies was indicated in the report. Funding for the individual projects would be from the Basic Need allocation and, where applicable, any Section 106 Agreements that were in place.

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised/highlighted:-

What was the selection criteria used to select the schools listed?

The schools across the Borough had been mapped out looking at those that were full/oversubscribed presently. In the longer term, if Bassingthorpe Farm as a development happened consideration would have to be given to Winterhill and Wingfield Schools but for the foreseeable future Winterhill could accommodate its future place planning demand

Why was St. Pius selected when it showed that there had been a reduction in the numbers expected for September, 2016? It states that the capacity is 665 and expected pupil numbers on roll in September, 2016 as 644. Could we have a chart with all the schools that had not been selected with their capacities and expected capacities?

St. Pius was full or oversubscribed for September and full/oversubscribed for every year. The report outlined where the expected secondary pupil numbers were for September and what the current capacity was. Some schools were near to full capacity, some operating in excess of 100%, whilst others were operating well below 90% and were not included in the report because there was still sufficient surplus capacity at this stage

The higher cohort numbers at St. Pius (Y10 and 11) were slightly under their Published Admission Number whereas the lower cohorts were up to or slightly above; it was the higher year groups where there was surplus capacity at St. Pius

Was the funding coming from the Council or Central Government?

All school expansions were funded from the Basic Need allocation. Annually the Local Authority submitted, based on school census data, the number of pupils across the Borough and placement. From that submission the DoE allocated Basic Need funding which was to provide additional places

What safeguards and assurances were there that a Academy would adhere to the Authority's standard policy for assigning places and not refuse admission based on special educational needs or additional needs of children

The funding that the Local Authority received from the DoE was to provide a sufficiency of school places across the Borough and to treat Local Authority maintained schools, Academies, free schools and other provision with equality so the places were delivered in areas of need regardless of status.

Academies, even though they were their own admissions authority, were still legally bound by the terms and conditions of the Admissions School Code of Practice. For instance, in a local authority maintained school the local authority could direct a school to take a pupil; in the case of an academy the local authority would seek the Secretary of State Direction. The statutory process was exactly the same but the line of accountability was different with an academy being directly accountable to the Secretary of State

Was there any provision for expansion of Special Schools?

The Head of Inclusion Services was preparing a Special Educational Needs Sufficiency survey with a view to a long term strategy. Additional SEN places were part of that long term strategy

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What form would the new classrooms take? Would they be permanent or temporary mobile classrooms?

It would be based upon a survey by surveyors and architect on site and whichever was the best fit. The 1,000 places provided so far had been a mix of modular and traditional build. It would depend upon the survey and what was best for that particular site

What period of time was the expansion projects aimed to cover?

Provisionally looking to start with the first expansion for the 2017/18 academic year and then 1-2 expansions per year thereafter. It was difficult to accurately predict due to not knowing what the funding allocation would be

If there was no increase in pupils and the classrooms not required was the funding returned?

In the last 6 years there had been a 13% increase in pupil numbers predominantly in the primary sector which would inevitably come through to the secondary phase. Mapping was taking place for those pupils hitting those schools in future years hence the reason for the long term strategy and preparation for them coming through to secondary education

If there was a sudden move in cohort from a particular learning community it would be seen from the projections in advance. It would happen over a period of time and the project would be halted and the funding re-directed elsewhere. However, based on the information coming through from feeder schools and from stability in cohorts, across the Borough (particularly in the primary sector) there was a 13% increase in pupils. Just over 1,000 additional places had been made available in the secondary feeder schools which would start to come through year on year to the secondary schools. If there was a sudden downfall an expansion project would not be proceeded with

It says 6 schools with 5 additional classrooms. Is that because of the funding or could the number of classrooms vary per school?

The 5 additional classrooms per school had been planned and based on an assumption of a class of pupils per year group and it allowed some flexibility in the system. The extensions would be designed in such a way that if there was a need to add extra classrooms it could be. There would need to be a minimum of 5 classrooms at the schools but they would be designed in such a way that they could be added in the future if needed

One of the schools listed was an academy. Who would be responsible for the upkeep of the new build?

Once the build and snagging process was completed, it would be signed over to the academy trust and became part of their portfolio and responsibility for any upkeep and maintenance

Was the expansion programme also taking into account Waverley?

Aston was the catchment area school for Waverley but the initial expansion was to address current need. A number of Rotherham's schools on the borders were net importers of pupils and took children from neighbouring authorities. Aston, as Waverley was further developed, would take more Waverley pupils and fewer extra district pupils allocated a place. The 5 additional classrooms would be designed in such a way that further classrooms could be added and achieve some long term economies of scale

What was the capacity of Swinton Community School?

It was carrying a significant surplus with all years below the Published Admission Number.

What would happen to Swinton Community School when Wath and St. Pius were extended and parents were successful in their first choice of school?

Swinton Community School's numbers did start to increase over the next 4-5 years. Wath in particular was very close to refusing its own catchment area pupils. Several primary schools in the Wath Learning Community had been extended so the school was a risk of not being able to accommodate its own catchment area pupils if it was not expanded. The numbers would start to increase at Swinton from its feeder schools in future years

Still concern that Wath and St. Pius were very sought after schools and it might impact on other 'less popular' schools. It seemed to be a blanket approach of £1.1M for 5 classrooms. Further information was requested about why they had been chosen specifically.

The Local Authority had a statutory duty to satisfy parental preferences as far as was possible within the funding allocated. The Local Authority had a long standing commitment to make sure there were sufficient catchment area places within a catchment area to satisfy applications; it was known that in a lot of the areas that catchment area numbers would outstrip the amount of places in that catchment school and was why the expansion programme had been submitted. From a success point of view, it was fair to say that Swinton, Wath and St. Pius Schools were of a similar judgement Ofsted wise. Some schools for whatever reason remained more popular with parents than others. The Local Authority had a statutory duty to provide places in successful and popular schools within those funding parameters to satisfy parental preference

How do we get all schools to the same standard so children were able to go to the local schools

There were 2 separate funding pots – Basic Need (creating new places in area of need to satisfy parental preference) and Capital Maintenance (for the purpose of safe, dry and warm projects). There had been quite significant investment at Swinton Community School for building maintenance with plans to spend more money in relation to that moving forward

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Was there a point in which these schools were so massive that we need an additional school? Was there any planning of an additional secondary school within the Authority so we do not end up with massive cohorts in schools but have smaller schools that were more spread out to help alleviate the problem of catchment area?

There were no plans presently to build any new secondary schools. All schools were not massive in Rotherham in fact some were significantly smaller than the average e.g. St. Bernard's, Thrybergh. There were some at the other end of the scale and Rotherham had some large and successful schools – Aston, Wickersley and Wath. Pressure also came from the fact that a lot of the successful schools were on the borders with the other authorities and attractive to children from neighbouring authorities. In relation to admissions, the Authority could not prejudice against in-Borough and extra district applications on National Offer Day; if a place was available on distance category to out of district applicant they legally had to be offered a place.

What would the £1.1M be used for? Building? Extra teaching staff? Equipment?

The Basic Need funding would fund the building and the resources such as furniture etc. ready to set a classroom up. Another fund was available through the Schools Forum (Contingency Pupil Growth Fund) where a school expansion created a need for teachers. There was a funding lag between new pupils starting when an expansion took place and the school getting the funding for the pupils generated from the school census. The Growth Fund funded the gap until the census generated the funding for the pupils. The Basic Need funding would fund the actual physical infrastructure whilst the Growth Fund funded the additional staffing requirements to support the pupils

Was there a plan b if the funding did not come through from Government?

If the funding was not available it would mean that the Authority's parental preference profile would reduce because more catchment area pupils would not get their catchment school or siblings get the same school

If there was no back up would the money be taken from the Local Authority budget?

Consideration would have to be given to prudential borrowing which at the present time was not an option. The report clearly stated this was a long term plan within DoE funding parameters and was why the timeline was difficult to allow working within the allocation parameters. It was hoped to expand 2 schools a year but if the funding dropped it would be 1 school per year

Will there be a detailed feasibility study undertaken?

There would be a detailed feasibility study undertaken by Capital Projects Officers. There had been a basic indicative study based on previous experience and an initial site survey but, as a project was brought forward, a more detailed and accurate assessment would be undertaken and a detailed report submitted to Members

Resolved:- That the report be noted.

17. IMPROVING LIVES WORK PROGRAMME - UPDATE

Caroline Webb, Scrutiny Officer, gave a brief powerpoint presentation for the benefit of new Members on the role of Scrutiny:-

What is scrutiny?

- A critical part of good governance
- Brings an independent perspective to bear on major decisions
- A way for Councillors, as elected representatives, to bring to bear the voice of local people
- Scrutiny is about a culture of constructive challenge, of learning and of positive change

How is scrutiny carried out?

- In-depth investigations or reviews carried out by small working parties or task and finish groups
- Ongoing monitoring of performance or other service delivery issues
- Site visits or 'mystery shopping'
- Seeking service user views
- Seeking the view of expert witnesses

Terms of Reference: Improving Lives

- Scrutinising the outcomes linked to the former 'Every Child Matters' agenda
- Scrutinising the early intervention/prevention agendas (now referred to as 'early help')
- Scrutinising other cross-cutting services provided specifically for children and young people
- Scrutinising the implementation of Rotherham's plans to tackle Child Sexual Exploitation

How is the work programme put together?

- Issues of concern raised by members; inspections or the public
- Referrals by Cabinet Members or partners
- Comments on the work of other public services, individually and in partnership
- Ongoing monitoring (e.g. performance or annual reports)
- Reports identified in forward plan of key decisions (pre-decision)
- Suggestions from officers

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Long List – issues identified

- Early help – impact
- Child sexual exploitation – including post-abuse support provision
- Children missing from health, home and education
- Domestic abuse including forced marriage, female genital mutilation and so called ‘honour-based violence’
- Looked after children including sufficiency strategy and improving outcomes
- Apprenticeships for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities
- Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) strategy
- Safeguarding – including performance of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)
- Local Safeguarding Children’s Board annual report
- Corporate Safeguarding Policy – implementation
- Adult Safeguarding annual report
- Performance information (quarterly performance information)
- Education – performance at Key Stages (incorporate into outturn report)

Prioritisation tool: PAPERS

- Public Interest: the concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen for scrutiny
- Ability to change: priority should be given to issues that the Committee can realistically influence
- Performance: priority should be given to the areas in which the Council, and other agencies, are not performing well
- Extent: priority should be given to issues that are relevant to all or large parts of the district
- Replication: work programmes must take account of what else is happening in the areas being considered to avoid duplication or wasted effort
- Statutory responsibility: where an issue is part of a statutory duty to scrutinise or hold to account

Prioritised short list

- Domestic Abuse
- Safeguarding
- CSE post-abuse support
- Early help
- SEND
- These issues would be considered as a balance of ‘reviews’, officer reports or other Scrutiny enquiries with 2 or 3 areas of indepth Scrutiny

Next Steps

- Refine focus/scope of each priority area
- Agree schedule – suggested Domestic Abuse to be considered early in programme
- Co-ordinate work programme with Corporate Parenting Panel (to avoid duplication)
- Formal report to be submitted to next meeting on agreed work programme with regular progress reports at each meeting

Mel Meggs stated that it really important that Children and Young People's Services received external scrutiny and offered the Select Commission any help it required to answer questions and help Members get to know more about the services and how well they were doing.

The prioritisation of domestic abuse was appropriate as it was thought to be an issue that Ofsted would be looking at in their next set of inspections. It was also an area that crossed between Adult and Children Services and really important for the Commission to be thinking how Adult and Children Services worked to support families together.

Resolved:- (1) That the update be noted.

(2) That a further report be submitted to the September meeting.

18. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That a further meeting be held on Wednesday, 21st September, 2016, at 1.30 p.m.