

## **Meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 6.00pm**  
**On Microsoft Teams**  
**[Click on this link to join the meeting](#)**

### **Agenda - Public Session** **(Meeting open to the public and press)**

#### 1. Chairs Announcements

Welcome to this virtual meeting. This is a formal Council Committee. The public proceedings will take place live on the Internet.

It will assist with the conduct of business if participants speak only when invited. I shall adjourn the meeting if necessary if protocol is not observed.

Members of the public are welcome to view the proceedings but should not make contributions until they are invited in line with our procedure.

All Members of the Committee have received the reports and associated documents in advance and had the opportunity to read them. The public reports are published on the Internet.

All participants should mute their microphones and video feed when they are not speaking.

Please remember to unmute your microphone and switch on your video feed when it is your turn to speak. Speak clearly and slowly into your microphone.

Anyone wishing to speak should indicate using the 'raise your hand' button on Microsoft Teams. I will invite people to speak at the appropriate time.

If you do not have the hand button, please type your request to speak in the chat function. Please note that the 'chat' function is monitored and has a full audit trail and anyone found to be misusing this function will be removed from the meeting.


Finally, I ask for everyone's patience with the use of technology. I apologise in advance if we experience any unforeseen difficulties which we shall try to



resolve expediently.

I shall now follow the agenda items as listed.

2. Apologies for absence.
3. To report the appointment of any substitute members serving for this meeting of the Committee.
4. To receive any declarations of interest under the Members' Code of Conduct.
5. To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 11th November 2020 as a correct record.
6. Children's Services Update – Acting Director of Children's Services.
7. Medium Term Financial Strategy (Pages 1 – 29)
8. Children's Services Customer Complaints: Response Times Action Plan (Pages 30 – 32)
9. Education Report (Pages 33 – 61)
10. To consider any questions from Members to the Chair where two clear days notice has been given to the Monitoring Officer (Council Procedure Rule 11.8).



**Chief Executive**

**Dated: 12th January 2021**

## **Distribution:**

### **Members of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee:**

Councillor A Millward (Chair)

Councillor P Sahota (Vice-Chair)

Councillors M Aston, J Baines, I Bevan, P Bradley, J Cooper, S Craigie, K Lewis, C Perks and S Ridley.

Cc Councillor R Buttery (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)

Church Representative – Mr T Reid (Worcester Diocesan Board of Education)

### **Please note the following:**

- Members of the public can view the proceedings by clicking on the link provided on the agenda.
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**Minutes of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee  
Wednesday, 11th November 2020 at 6.00 pm  
Microsoft Teams Meeting**

**Present:**

Councillor A Millward (Chair)  
Councillor P Sahota (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors M Aston, J Baines, I Bevan, P Bradley, J Cooper, S Craigie, K Lewis, C Perks and S Ridney.

**Officers:**

H Ellis (Acting Director of Children's Services), A Stone (Service Director of Children's Social Care), J Walker (Service Manager Safeguarding and Review) and K Buckle (Democratic Services Officer).

**Also In Attendance:**

One representative of Dudley Youth Council together with four Members of the Public.

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13. **Declarations of Interest**

No Member made a Declaration of Interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of any item to be considered at the meeting.

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14. **Minutes**

**Resolved**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9th September 2020, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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15. **Children's Services Update**

The Acting Director of Children's Services referred to the very challenging period and advised that a substantial amount of work had been undertaken to reopen some of the Children's Services buildings, with staff operating in a Covid secure manner.



The Acting Director of Children's Services referred to Children's Services objective which was to secure a permanent Leadership Team, which had resulted in the recent appointments of Nicola Hale, the new Head of Safeguarding, and Heidi Henderson, the new Head of Children in Care. It was advised that interviews for the Head of Education Outcomes and Inclusion were to take place imminently.

It was reported that all Contact Centres and 15 Family Centres had been open since July 2020, with the Corbyn Road facility scheduled to reopen on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2020, where the majority of social workers would be based.

Early Help and Statutory visits had continued during the pandemic, and Liquidlogic targets had been met with the programme going live on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

From an education perspective, it was reported that schools continued to be supported to remain open, although it was accepted that due to Covid-19 outbreaks some schools had had no alternative but to close. Attendance rates were 80 to 85%, which were considered good under the current circumstances, and the Acting Director of Children's Services wished to thank all schools for their hard work and efforts to remain open.

The continued improvement journey of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) was referred to, together with the continued improvements of Social Care Services.

In referring to children's social care, The Acting Director of Children Services reported that the Improvement Plan had been endorsed the previous week by the Improvement Board, with a vast majority of improvement work continuing.

The number of recorded contacts into the MASH were referred to and it commented that 1,299 contacts had been recorded in September 2020, which had reduced to 1051 in October, with on average, Early Help Services working with 1000 families.

In terms of the Ofsted Assurance Visit that was conducted between 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> October, Ofsted considered findings from the Children's Services inspection that was conducted in October 2018, when the Service was judged as requiring improvement. Ofsted focused on areas of strength and improvement which were identified in the local SEND inspection carried out in May 2019, and also considered the findings from the Focus visit which was conducted in December 2019. Ofsted evaluated the experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account the Covid-19 context, how well children and young people were helped and protected and then the effectiveness of leadership and management, including the arrangements to meet the needs of children as restrictions eased during the summer. Ofsted would not include a graded judgment in the published report. The report would state whether Inspectors found any serious or widespread concerns for the welfare of children, and the report would include requirements and recommendations for improvement.

Assurances were provided that all the findings were reflected within the Children's Services Improvement Plan. Therefore, before the Focus visit, the Service already had a robust Improvement Plan, which Ofsted were provided with and they were assured that the Service was very self-aware. Children's Services received a draft letter which



was forwarded back to Ofsted challenging factual inaccuracies. That letter would be published on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

Arising from the verbal update, questions and concerns were raised and responses were provided as follows: -

- A report in relation to the Ofsted Focus Visit findings could not be prepared prior to the letter referred to above being published, as the information was currently embargoed, however the Committee would have sight of the published letter.
- In relation to the MASH referrals, a number of which had been received from Health Care Services and schools, once children returned. Upon further examination of referrals received, a number were due to a raised sense of anxiety around children, those contacts had been worked through to ensure whether they met the threshold for social care or more appropriate to be referred to Early Help Services. Work was being conducted across the partnership with the MASH Operations Group, analysing the referrals in order to have some definitive analysis to develop an understanding of the types of referrals, and arising issues which would be shared across the partnership. It was accepted that there had been a surge in referrals that should not have been referred to the MASH. Following further analysis of the referrals, an update on that analysis would be provided to the next meeting.
- In terms of communication, it was key to have clear lines of communication with front line staff, in order to ensure that Line Managers were supporting those staff. Team briefings were taking place with time for reflection, and staff were meeting in Covid secure groups. Work had been undertaken in order to re-open the Corbyn Road facility in order for staff to work with others, albeit within Covid restrictions. Assurances were provided that front line staff were fully supported, with the help of Human Resources. There was also a Counselling helpline available that provided emotional and wellbeing support.
- There were regular meetings with front line staff with a robust schedule for those meetings in place.
- The Service Director Children's Social Care reported that she had chaired a meeting with the Safeguarding Partnership, when discussions were undertaken in relation to which partnerships would be visiting families, children and young people and which visits would take place virtually. The meeting was helpful in order to ascertain which partners were undertaking visits. A number of partners were involved in the meeting including hospitals, health visiting, mental health services and the police. Meetings would continue to take place every six weeks in order to monitor those visits.
- Staff sickness levels were increasing, and sickness levels would continue to be monitored. It was noted however that not all were Covid related. Work was being conducted closely with Human Resources in order to ensure that welfare support for staff was in place.



It was accepted that front line staff sickness resulted in pressures on the remaining staff, who had to continue to deliver services. There were continuing difficulties with recruitment, due to relocation problems resulting from Covid-19.

Members thanked the Acting Director of Children's Services for the update, appreciating that these were challenging times and congratulated the service in relation to the imminent implementation of the Liquidlogic.ICT system.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the analysis of the types of referrals into the MASH be reported on at the next meeting of the Committee.
- (2) That the information on the Children's Services update and as reported on at the meeting, be noted.

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#### **16. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020**

Members considered the report that provided assurances of the effective functioning of the Safeguarding and Review Service, that had operational line management of IRO's for children subject to Child Protection Plans and effective care planning for Children in Care (CIC).

The Acting Head of Safeguarding presented the report submitted, referring to the key areas of focus and updates were provided on those areas.

One of the key areas was to increase the number of children who chaired their own reviews, and a survey had been conducted, which evidenced that 30% of young people had been requested to chair their own meeting.

There had been key areas of work in relation to restorative practice, with current Child Protection Conferences working to that model.

It was noted that the IRO's role was to feed back to the Local Authority both good practice that was outlined in the report, and also pose effective challenge where children's Care Plans were experiencing drift and delay. It was stated that for the first time in Quarter 4, there was a quarterly report that outlined the activity that was taking place in relation to the number and progress of escalations.

In terms of emerging themes, the Local Authority were developing the contextual response in relation to safeguarding and were involved in auditing work that had informed the Service Plan of the areas that required improvement within the IRO Service.

The key roles and responsibilities of the IRO's were referred to, together with the additional responsibilities and the support that the IRO's provide to the Local Authority, for example attendance at the Access to Resource Panels.



The tables within the report submitted in relation to the numbers of children the IRO's had worked with across the year were noted, together with the fact that this had been relatively consistent in terms of children subject to Child Protection Plans, and the number of looked after children.

Amendments to ICT systems had been made, in order to capture the data and information from Managers on late response times to complaints, and the reasons for those late responses. That data had been collated from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020, with Managers now providing information for late responses from the beginning of the financial year.

It was reported that young people and children in care had been involved with the development of the IRO Service. There were two elements to participation, the first was how children were involved in their case work, for example chairing their own IRO meetings, and secondly how children and young people shape the services.

Two consultation events had taken place with children in care, and a survey would continue to take place annually. A joint event with the Children In Care Council had also taken place with a group of young people who were met in person by Officers and also the IRO's, in order to provide support to help them facilitate their own meetings in the future. It was noted that those meetings would continue.

In relation to performance, the Timeliness of reviews was referred to and in terms of children in care reviews, the timeliness over the first part of the year was good, meeting targets at 95%, however that target had been increased to 100%.

Child Protection Conferences should be held within 15 days of the strategy discussion. The target to be met had been 80%, that had been increased to 90%, as the ambition was to continually seek to improve on targets.

In between formal meetings there were progress reviews to ensure that the children's Plans were making good progress.

The Dispute Resolution Process was referred to, with a view to the IRO providing feedback and re-assurance to the Local Authority and challenging where a Child's Plan had experienced drift or delay.

The Quarterly Reports were shared with the Department Leadership Forum, and that process had resulted in an increase in the numbers of dispute resolutions, which evidenced that IRO's were raising concerns on behalf of children and young people. The majority were resolved informally through conversations initially.

It was reported that the majority of disputes were in relation to pathways or care plans not being completed in timescales, or there were outstanding actions on the Plan.



Those concerns were reflected in the Informal Dispute Resolutions that had been proceeded to the second stage in the resolution process.

In relation to best practice, the example of a Duty Social Worker who had continued to work with a 17 year old to ensure that the young person was appropriately prepared and supported with securing a grant for a laptop and furniture for her new property, was outlined.

The business support that supported the effective delivery of positive outcomes for children and young people was outlined.

Areas for improvement included parent participation, improving access to advocacy services and also meeting performance targets and it was reported that the IRO's were driving a broader role of improvement across Social Work teams.

The aim of the Service objectives for the current financial year were for one form of feedback and consultation to take place every other month, which would include partner agencies and parents, for both child protection and children looked after.

It was stated that business support had been strengthened in relation to reviews, the completion of a 'You Said We Did' poster following the consultation that had taken place earlier in the year, and a number of Working Groups had been established in order to further strengthen participation within the service.

In relation to improving the use of advocacy, that would continue to be discussed with IRO's during their annual appraisals, supervision and team meetings. IRO's now met with the Advocacy Services to ensure the use of advocacy continued to take place.

In relation to effective challenge the robustness of increasing challenge had taken place in order that statutory timelines were met.

The learning and development offer in order to strengthen the IRO's ability to carry out their key roles and functions were referred to.

Arising from the presentation of the report submitted Members made comments and asked questions and Officers responded as follows: -

- The implementation of Liquidlogic ICT systems within Children's Services would facilitate monitoring in relation to progress reviews.
- In terms of children and young people participating in their reviews, there were two levels of participation, one was being actively involved within their case work and the second was consultation.
- Consultations with children and young people were necessary in order to gather evidence in relation to the services being offered and whether those services required improvements. Methods of consultation would be examined in order to improve the participation strategy.

- It was accepted that Covid-19 had impacted on IRO Service development.
- The data in relation to black male and female IRO's would be included in future reports in relation to the Service.
- Virtual meetings were taking place and targets continued to be met.
- The percentage figures in relation to those who chaired their own meetings were calculated from a survey and were not representative of the overall cohort.
- Consultations and surveys were undertaken in order to improve services.
- One of the targets for IRO's was to provide facilitation for children and young people to feel confident to chair their own reviews.
- It was accepted that caseloads were high within the care management service, as there had been an increase in referrals, and Head of Services were ensuring that the correct cases were being dealt with in the correct services, as it had become apparent that some referrals needed to be transferred to Early Help and Universal services.
- Methods of reporting would be investigated as the report presented only provided data up until March 2020.
- A participation stream had commenced in order to capture the voices of children and young people. There was a Service Plan for the Review Unit, with work commencing during the first week in December in order to investigate how to engage with children, young people and their families.

## **Resolved**

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted on the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual report 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, be noted.
- (2) That as part of the children and young people's reviews, the IRO's be requested to consult with children and young people in order to capture the voice of the child and improve and develop services.

## 17. **Fostering and Permanence Service Update Report**

Members considered the report in relation to Dudley's Fostering and Permanence Service.

The Service Director of Children's Social Care presented the report submitted referring to paragraphs of significant importance.

In relation to recruitment, the Recruitment and Fostering Team continued to work in order to increase the range of foster carers and recruit those who could support more challenging children.

It was noted that should it be possible to return children and young people back to their families, that would remain a priority.

Adoption for children was located within the Regional Adoption Agency, Adoption@Heart. This Agency was also utilised by Wolverhampton and Sandwell.

The different settings for the 635 children in care in Dudley were referred to, together with the work being conducted with Commissioning Services to examine the need for the looked after children population to ensure that the correct provision for children in care was being delivered. There was the ambition to keep children in settings where they were close to their existing schools and local areas.

Although it had not been possible to deliver virtual training during the pandemic, young people had been provided with boxes which included equipment and activities for improving their mental health, however this would be reviewed with the new Head of Children in Care once in post.

In relation to permanency for children, decisions were required to be made on a timely basis and plans for children were regularly monitored for each and every one of those children in care in order to proactively drive those plans forward.

In relation to adoption, every other possibility for permanence would have been examined prior to the adoption, with evidence gathering and consultation with Legal Services taking place in relation to securing permanency for a child.

Arising from the presentation of the report, Members asked questions and the Service Director of Children's Social Care responded as follows: -

- In relation to the four children in Fostering for Adoption placements, it was confirmed that these children were still children for adoption. There were adopters who were willing to be foster carers, in order to prevent moves for children. Some clarification would be provided in relation to those children who were in fostering to adopt settings, for fostering purposes only and those who were to be adopted.

- In terms of Adopton@Heart, an email to the Regional Service Directors had been received from Mark Tobin, the Head of Service, in relation to lots of activity to increase the diversity of adopters, as ideally there would be an ethnic match where that was possible. Within the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community there were fewer who were willing to adopt. Within the Regional Adoption Agency work in relation to diverse recruitment was taking place and the Service Director of Children's Social Care expressed the desire to be part of that work. It was reported that Members would be appraised of the outcome of that work at a future meeting of the Committee.
- Unregulated provision was not regulated by Ofsted, although that was being debated across the Country. Within Dudley young people and children under the age of 16 were not placed in unregulated provision, and work was being conducted with colleagues across the council to examine those placements, with visits regularly taking place to those unregulated provisions. There was also a Forum that considered those provisions. Work continued with the Police and housing colleagues and should issues arise support would be put into place. The Improvement Plan and the work being conducted with Commissioning partners formed part of that work stream.
- Previously there had not been the correct amount of rigour on progressing permanency, however, should it have been determined that a child would be adopted, meetings were conducted every fortnight, and work would continue order to progress adoptions on a timely basis.
- The 'Reflect Project' was referred to, whereby work was conducted to put support in place for a family who had previously had a child removed from their home.
- There was a national problem in relation to in-house fostering provision and the Government had launched a review in care provision and sufficiency and accommodation for children. The Local Authority's Children's Services would be involved in the review.
- Planned work on a sufficiency strategy in relation to foster carers would take place.
- The status of the Resource Panel that was chaired by the Acting Director of Children's Services would be enhanced in order to ensure that every child was in the right placement. Lifting the status of Dudley's resource panel to ensure for every child the right place was identified.
- The Acting Director of Children's Services provided assurances that within the Children's Services Improvement Plan, permanency for children was an absolute priority and work would be conducted to drive through that immediate action and further updates would be provided to the Committee.



## Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted on Dudley's Fostering and Permanence Service, be noted.
- (2) That further updates in relation to Dudley's Fostering and Permanence Services be submitted to future meetings of the Committee.
- (3) That the Acting Head of Children's Services be requested to provide clarification in relation to the number of children who were in fostering to adopt settings, for fostering purposes only or were to be adopted.

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### 18. **Children in Care and Care Leaver Service – Care Leavers Update Report**

A report of the Acting Director of Children's Services was submitted on the scope and detail in relation to Dudley Care Leavers.

The Service Director of Children's Social Care presented the report submitted, advising that a care leaver was defined as a young person aged 16 to 25 years.

The Care Leaver strategy 2016 was referred to, together with the five key outcome areas that Dudley should seek to achieve for all young people leaving care.

It was reported that during the recent Ofsted visit, Officers had commented positively on the support provided to young people during Covid-19, referring specifically to the WhatsApp method of keeping in contact with children and young people.

It was further noted that there were extremely strong relationships with young people and their Youth Participation Workers.

It was reported that Dudley currently had 16 young people at university studying courses from Social Work Degrees to Masters Degrees in advanced Chemistry.

The aspirations were for young people to have the same opportunities as those who were not looked after children.

The caseloads of a Young Persons Advisor were referred to, together with the proportion of care leavers accessing education, employment and training.

In relation to the work of Black Country Impact with 13 to 29 year olds in 2018, it was recognised that this required re-visiting and the programme of work would be re-considered , due to the benefit that work provided to children and young people previously.

It was reported that a review of the Pledge and Local Offer for care leavers may take place and it was intended to involve care leavers with that review.



The Chair commented positively on the offer to care leavers and also on the work of the Children's Corporate Parenting Board and Councillor Paul Bradley in relation to securing a council tax exemption for all care leavers, and also the fact that several care leavers were attending University.

The Chair also referred to the need to encourage those who were awarded contracts with the Local Authority, to offer apprenticeships to care leavers, and the possibility of consulting with housing colleagues in order to achieve this. It was also suggested that the public sector partners be approached in that regard, for example the Police and Health partners.

A Member suggested that the above be discussed at the Children's Corporate Parenting Board, as this had been raised at a previous Board meeting but not progressed. The same Member also suggested that when procuring or commissioning contracts, part of the negotiations should include the possibility of offering apprenticeships to care leavers.

It was also suggested that sections of the report submitted should also be presented to the Children's Corporate Parenting Board.

Members echoed the positive comments of the Chair in relation to care leavers attending University.

There followed a request that Members be provided with data in terms of percentages of care leavers attending further education or obtaining employment and the outcomes for those young people.

Details of the profiles of Young People's Advisors was also requested.

The Acting Director of Children's Services undertook to obtain a breakdown of destinations in relation to care leavers.

The need for the Local Authority to provide a base for young people to meet with their Advisors was also required, and it was suggested that the Council's former Children's Home in Brierley Hill could be utilised for that purpose. It was agreed that this item would be discussed at the Children's Corporate Parenting Board.

There followed a request that data be provided on the numbers of females and males who were not in education, employment or training.

The Chair referred to the need for a Champion for Children in Care.

## Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted on the Care Leavers Service, be noted.
  - (2) That the Children in Care and Care Leaver Service – Care Leavers Update Report be submitted to a meeting of the Children's Corporate Parenting Board.
  - (3) The Acting Director of Children's Services be requested to: -
    - (a) Refer the suggestion to encourage those who were awarded contracts with the Local Authority to offer apprenticeships to care leavers, and the possibility of consulting with Housing colleagues in order to achieve that to the Children's Corporate Parenting Board.
    - (b) Provide Members with data in terms of percentages of care leavers attending further education or obtaining employment and the outcomes for those young people.
    - (c) Provide Members with details of profiles of Young People Advisors.
    - (d) Consider the possibility of utilising the Council's former Children's Home in Brierley Hill for a base for young people to meet their Young People's Advisor.
    - (e) Provide Members with a breakdown of the number of females and males not in education, employment or training.
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## 19. **Closing Remarks of the Chair**

This being the last meeting of the Year, the Chair wished Members a Merry Christmas.

The meeting ended at 7.42pm

CHAIR





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## **Meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

### **Joint Report of the Chief Executive, Director of Finance and Legal and Acting Director of Children's Services**

### **Medium Term Financial Strategy**

#### **Purpose**

1. To consult the Scrutiny Committee on the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2023/24 as approved by Cabinet on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020, with emphasis on those proposals relating to the committee's terms of reference. For this committee the relevant items are those relating to Children's Services in paragraphs 25 and 28, and Appendices D and E.

#### **Recommendations**

2. That the Committee considers and comments on the Cabinet's proposals for the Medium Term Financial Strategy to 2023/24, taking into account the considerations set out in paragraph 38.

#### **Background**

3. The Council approved the General Fund budget for 2020/21 and the MTFS to 2022/23 on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2020.
4. A report on the 2019/20 outturn was considered by Cabinet on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

#### **External Audit**

5. The External Auditors (Grant Thornton) presented their Audit Findings Report to the Audit and Standards Committee on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020.

6. On the basis of significant risks threatening the Council's financial sustainability, they reported their intention to give an adverse qualified opinion on Value for Money. They have subsequently reviewed the position and issued a qualified "except for" opinion on Value for Money.

#### Forecast 2020/21 Position

7. Since originally setting the budget in March, the Council's operations and finances have been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The forecasts in this report are made in the context of significant uncertainty about the path of the virus, the nature and duration of the public health measures and the severity of the economic impact, so the financial impact by the year end may in practice be greater.
8. In response to Covid-19, the Government has directed significant additional funding to councils and the table in Appendix A shows the allocation to Dudley. Of the forecast allocation, £30.5m is unringfenced (of which £0.9m was used to offset impacts in the last financial year and £29.6m remains to offset impacts in 2020/21). The remainder (standing at £132.4m and rising) is for specific purposes and is expected to be matched by specific increases in expenditure or reductions in income.
9. The forecast General Fund position after transfers from / to earmarked reserves is as follows. It is important to note that this table does not include forecast reductions in Business Rates and Council Tax income (see Collection Fund below) as these do not impact on the General Fund in the current year, but can be spread over future years.

Directorate	Latest Budget £m	Outturn £m	Variance £m
Chief Executive Other	0.8	0.9	0.1
Adult Social Care	97.0	102.8	5.8
Children's Services	69.1	77.4	8.3
Health and Wellbeing	2.9	3.0	0.1
Finance and Legal	3.6	3.9	0.3
Commercial and Customer Services	0.7	5.2	4.5
Housing	6.6	6.7	0.1
Public Realm	50.1	51.3	1.2
Regeneration and Enterprise	11.0	15.3	4.3
Corporate, Treasury and Levies	8.2	7.1	(1.1)
<b>Total Service Costs</b>	<b>250.0</b>	<b>273.6</b>	<b>23.6</b>
<b>Total Resources</b>	<b>(250.0)</b>	<b>(279.6)</b>	<b>(29.6)</b>
<b>Use of Balances</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>(6.0)</b>	<b>(6.0)</b>

10. Further detail is provided in Appendix B. The significant variances are as follows:
- We have included £21.0m of service pressures on returns to the Government identifying costs arising from Covid-19 and we are forecasting £29.6m of unringfenced Covid-19 funding for 2020/21 which will generate a net favourable variance of £8.6m. This does not include pressures on Business Rates and Council Tax income (see Collection Fund below).
  - There are pressures arising from Children Looked After placements totalling £3.4m
  - There is an underlying cost pressure of £1.3m within Home to School Transport.
  - The Successor project is forecast to cost an additional £1.0m.
  - As a result of local elections being postponed until May 2021 there is a £0.3m underspend this financial year.
  - The budget included provision for a 2% staff pay award, but this has now been settled nationally at 2.75% which represents a £1.0m cost pressure.
  - Due to slippage in the Council's borrowing requirement there are £1.0m savings in debt financing costs.
  - Release of the £2m contingency provision from the original budget.
  - Other net favourable variances of £0.8m
11. Progress with delivery of specific savings within the current budget is set out in Appendix C. Performance on delivery of savings supports and is consistent with the forecast 2020/21 position outlined above and in Appendix B.
12. The costs of Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) services are met from the High Needs Block within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). As previously reported, we (in common with many other councils) have been experiencing significant financial pressures from increasing demand for children that require additional educational support. Notwithstanding the high-level recovery plan that has been agreed, there is a forecast deficit on the High Needs Block of £13.9m at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. The Government has regulated to ensure that this pressure sits within the Dedicated Schools Grant and can be recovered over a number of financial years. As such it is not included in Appendix B.

### General Fund Balances

13. The impact of the outturn shown above leaves the main unallocated General Fund Balance at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 as follows:

	<b>Original Budget £m</b>	<b>Latest Position £m</b>
Forecast balance 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2020	15.2	15.2
2019/20 outturn (as reported to July Cabinet)		+0.5
<b>Balance at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>15.7</b>
Forecast 20/21 outturn		+6.0
<b>General Fund Balance at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021</b>		<b>21.7</b>

14. This continues to show a low level of reserves in the light of the financial challenges that the Council faces.

#### Medium Term Financial Strategy to 2023/24

15. In updating the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, Members will need to consider carefully:
- (a) the levels of Government support allocated to the Council;
  - (b) spending pressures, opportunities to free up resources (including savings), and Council Plan priorities;
  - (c) the implications of spending levels in later years as part of the Council's medium term financial plan;
  - (d) the views of consultees;
  - (e) the external factors and risks inherent in the Strategy;
  - (f) the impact on Council Tax payers.
  - (g) the potential impacts on people with protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010. Members will need to have due regard to the public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010. (Further details are set out in the Equality Impact section below.)

#### Government Funding

16. Forecasts presented to Cabinet were based on the Chancellor's announcements in the one-year Spending Review on 25<sup>th</sup> November. These included the following:
- An increase in assumed Business Rate income and underlying Revenue Support Grant in line with inflation. The actual Business Rate multiplier will be frozen but councils will be compensated for the income shortfall compared with an inflationary uplift.

- Additional Social Care Grant of £300m nationally.
- Improved Better Care Fund to continue at 2020/21 levels.
- New Homes Bonus funding on the basis of new homes (and reductions in long term empty homes) above a threshold, with a consultation on review for 2022/23 to be published shortly.
- One-off £1.55bn unringfenced funding nationally for Covid spending pressures in 2021/22.
- Continuation of compensation for a proportion of lost income from sales fees and charges for the first quarter of 2021/22.
- Compensation for a proportion of 2020/21 Council Tax and Business Rates losses, which would otherwise have to be charged to the General Fund in future years.
- £670m unringfenced funding nationally towards the anticipated additional cost of providing Local Council Tax Support in 2021/22.
- Continuation of the 2017/18 100% Business Rates Retention pilots – including that for the West Midlands.

We have subsequently received the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2021/22 including allocations to individual councils and a verbal update will be given to Scrutiny Committees.

17. The Government has indicated that it will take stock of the previously proposed funding reforms (Business Rate Retention and Fair Funding Review) in the context of the position in which the sector now finds itself, both with regard to the impact the pandemic has had on the resources available to councils, and the demands on local services.

### Council Tax

18. Forecasts to Cabinet took into account the economic outlook reflected in the Spending Review, and indicated:
  - A Collection Fund deficit of £2m for the current year arising mainly from increased numbers of working age Council Tax Reduction (CTR) claimants and partially offset by government compensation for losses of income. This deficit was assumed to be charged to the General Fund over the next three years (£1.8m in 2021/22 and £0.1m in each of 2022/23 and 2023/24).
  - Ongoing reductions in the Council Tax base, mainly arising from increases in the number of working age CTR claimants, peaking at around 17,500 in the second quarter of 2021 and then recovering gradually in line with the assumptions in the Spending Review.

Forecasts have also been adjusted to reflect current numbers of households in receipt of discounts and exemptions. The position will continue to be monitored closely and any updated forecasts reported to Cabinet in February.

19. The Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018 enabled the Council to increase the “Empty Homes Premium”, thereby increasing the council tax payable on properties that have been empty for more than two years as follows:

- from 1st April 2019 for properties which have been empty for between two and five years a premium of up to 100%, resulting in a 200% council tax charge;
- from 1st April 2020 for properties which have been empty for between five and ten years a premium of up to 200%, resulting in a 300% council tax charge;
- from 1st April 2021 for properties which have been empty for ten years or more a premium of up to 300%, resulting in a 400% council tax charge.

The Council, when setting the 2019/20 and 2020/21 budgets, agreed that the flexibilities available from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 and 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 be utilised in full from those dates. It is now proposed that the further flexibility available from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 be utilised in order to incentivise the bringing back into use of some of the Borough's housing stock in line with the Council's Empty Homes Strategy.

20. The Spending Review included proposed Council Tax referendum principles for 2021/22 of a core limit of less than 2% plus an Adult Social Care (ASC) precept limit of 3%. There has been no indication that an ASC precept will be allowed in subsequent years. However, the 3% for 2021/22 can be spread over the two years 2021/22 and 2022/23.

### Business Rates

21. Forecasts to Cabinet took into account the economic outlook reflected in the Spending Review and indicated:

- A Collection Fund deficit for the current year reflecting challenges to collection, partially mitigated by 100% relief for retail, leisure, hospitality and nurseries and also partially offset by government compensation for losses of income. This deficit (of £2.3m net of grants carried forward in reserve) was assumed to be charged to the General Fund over the next three years (£1.1m in 2021/22 and £0.6m in each of 2022/23 and 2023/24).
- A prudent assumption that 100% relief for retail, leisure, hospitality and nurseries will cease in 2021/22, though final announcements on this are not expected until the new year.
- Adverse impacts in the wake of the pandemic, leading to increased empty property reliefs, removal of properties from rating and other losses. Forecasts were on the basis that these impacts will peak in 2021 and gradually recover.

There is ongoing uncertainty concerning the impact of the 2017 revaluation on our business rate and grant income. We continue to face considerable uncertainty arising from the impact of appeals following the revaluation and the introduction of the new “Check, Challenge, Appeal” process. We have already applied part of our provision for appeals to partially offset underlying reductions in gross rates payable and further application of the appeals provision is likely to be needed in future years. The position will continue to be monitored closely and any updated forecasts reported to Cabinet in February.

### Combined Authority

22. The West Midlands Combined Authority (CA) receives three elements of funding via the constituent authorities as follows:
- The Transport Levy to fund its transport functions, allocated by statute on a population basis.
  - A contribution to reflect assumed real terms growth in the central share of business rates from 2016/17 onwards to fund its regeneration activities, under the terms of the Devolution Deal.
  - A further contribution to fund its non-transport functions currently allocated by agreement partly on a population basis and partly by equal shares.
23. Forecasts in this report assume that contributions continue on the same basis.

### Base Budget Forecasts

24. The Base Budget reflects the impact on spending of forecast inflation and other anticipated changes, before directorate spending pressures or savings proposals are taken into account. Details are as follows.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
	£m	£m	£m
2020/21 base	250.0	250.0	250.0
Pay ( <i>note 1</i> )	1.4	3.5	5.9
General price inflation ( <i>note 2</i> )	-	3.2	6.7
Income uplift ( <i>note 3</i> )	-0.8	-1.8	-3.1
Pensions ( <i>note 4</i> )	-0.8	-1.6	0.7
Combined Authority ( <i>see paras 22-23</i> )	0.1	0.3	0.4
Treasury ( <i>note 5</i> )	1.2	1.6	0.9
Remove previous contingency ( <i>note 6</i> )	-2.0	-2.0	-2.0
Other adjustments ( <i>note 7</i> )	-0.7	-1.1	-1.3
<b>Base Budget Forecast</b>	<b>248.4</b>	<b>252.1</b>	<b>258.2</b>

Notes:



- (1) Allows for an increase in line with the Chancellor's announced public sector "pay freeze" in 2021/22 with increases only for staff earning less than £24,000 per annum of £250, and increases in line with forecast CPI thereafter. The 2021/22 figure also includes the impact of the actual 2020/21 pay settlement being 2.75% rather than the budgeted 2%. Note that Central Government does not control Local Government pay directly.
- (2) No general provision has been made for 2021/22, with any specific inflationary issues being reflected in spending pressures below.
- (3) Assumes an increase of 2% per year on fees and charges.
- (4) Contributions in 2023/24 will be determined following the 2022 actuarial review. It is currently assumed this will not give rise to any change in underlying contributions. Contributions in individual years are impacted by the current arrangements which give varying annual discounts for 3 year advance payment.
- (5) Impact of Capital Programme, treasury management and investment income changes.
- (6) The existing Medium Term Financial Strategy includes a £2m general contingency. Specific pressures have now been identified within this report so to avoid double counting the contingency has been removed.
- (7) Fall-out of previous one-off items, non treasury impact of Leisure Centre Strategy, and other adjustments.

### Spending Pressures

25. Spending pressures provided for are as follows. These are detailed in Appendix D.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
	£m	£m	£m
Adult Social Care	5.2	7.1	9.0
Children's Services	4.8	4.8	4.8
Health and Wellbeing	0.1	0.1	0.1
Chief Executive	0.3	0.3	0.3
Finance and Legal Services	0.6	0.6	0.6
Commercial and Customer Services	0.5	1.0	1.1
Regeneration and Enterprise	0.0	0.0	0.1
Housing and Communities	0.3	0.3	0.3
Public Realm	0.3	0.8	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>17.1</b>

26. In addition to ongoing pressures the proposed budget contains a £6.7m contingency for Covid cost pressures and loss of income, to the extent that they are not covered from the extended compensation for Sales, Fees and Charges scheme, that may arise in the early part of 2021/22.

27. Proposals within the report include provision to cease Mandatory Unpaid Leave (£1.1m) and restore 1% previously withheld from Grade 7 and above (0.7m) from 2021/22 onwards.

### Savings

28. In total the following saving proposals have been identified as the basis for scrutiny and consultation. Details are set out in Appendix E.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
	£m	£m	£m
Adult Social Care	3.2	3.7	3.8
Children's Services	1.3	2.1	2.1
Commercial and Customer Services	0.0	0.1	0.1
Regeneration and Enterprise	0.6	0.7	1.0
Housing and Communities	0.1	0.1	0.1
Public Realm	0.2	0.2	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>7.3</b>

### Public Health

29. The recent Spending Review announcement did not give any detail regarding future years Public Health Grant allocations, except that it will remain flat in real terms and continue to be ring fenced. It is therefore assumed that general inflation will be added annually in line with the Consumer Price Index. The future intention regarding Agenda for Change is unclear, however the spending review made a commitment to NHS pay increases which would need to be reflected in future grant allocations. It is assumed that the grant will be fully spent in 2021/22 onwards, nevertheless these estimates will be reviewed again with Dudley's new Director of Public Health.
30. The overall forecast position for the Public Health Grant funded budget can be summarised as follows:

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
	£m	£m	£m
Base budget forecast	21.3	21.7	22.0
One-off spending plans	0.6	0.6	0.0
<b>Total spend</b>	<b>21.9</b>	<b>22.3</b>	<b>22.0</b>
Forecast grant	21.3	21.7	22.0
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>-0.6</b>	<b>-0.6</b>	<b>0.0</b>
Reserve brought forward	1.2	0.6	0.0
<b>Reserve carried forward</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

## Medium Term Financial Strategy

31. The MTFS reflecting the revised spending proposals set out above, and forecasts of resource availability, was summarised to Cabinet as follows.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
	£m	£m	£m
<b>Base Budget Forecast</b> - see para 24	248.4	252.1	258.2
<b>Pressures</b> - see para 25	12.1	15.0	17.1
<b>Covid Contingency</b>	6.7		
<b>Savings</b> - see para 28	-5.4	-6.9	-7.3
<b>Terms and Conditions</b>	1.8	1.8	1.8
<b>Total Service Spend</b>	<b>263.6</b>	<b>262.0</b>	<b>269.8</b>
Retained Business Rates	84.0	86.4	89.0
Tariff	-6.0	-6.1	-6.2
Business Rate Grant	12.6	12.9	13.2
New Homes Bonus	0.2	0.2	0.2
Improved Better Care Fund (IBCF)	16.1	16.4	16.7
Social Care Grant	11.8	12.0	12.2
Covid General Grant	6.7		
LCTS Support Grant	3.3		
Council Tax	133.2	138.3	142.8
Collection Fund Deficit – Council Tax	-1.8	-0.1	-0.1
Collection Fund Deficit – Business Rates <sup>1</sup>	-46.1	-0.6	-0.6
Business Rate Grant reserve	45.0		
<b>Total Resources</b>	<b>259.0</b>	<b>259.4</b>	<b>267.2</b>
<b>Deficit funded from Balances</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>2.6</b>
Balances brought forward	21.7	17.1	14.5
<b>Balances carried forward</b>	<b>17.1</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>11.9</b>

32. The table above assumes that Council Tax increases by 4.99% in 2021/22 and 1.99% in subsequent years. Based on proposed referendum limits, this would not require a referendum in accordance with Chapter 4ZA of Part 1 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

<sup>1</sup> 2021/22 figure mainly resulting from increased relief for retail, leisure, hospitality and nurseries in 2020/21, offset by Business Rates Grant received in the General Fund in 2020/21 and carried forward into 2021/22 via an earmarked reserve, shown on following line in table.

## Estimates, Assumptions & Risk Analysis

33. The proposals in this report are based on a number of estimates, assumptions and professional judgements, which are subject to continuous review:
- (a) that pay inflation does not vary materially from current forecasts;
  - (b) that the 2021/22 finance settlement and any specific grant income would be in line with forecasts;
  - (c) that in subsequent years income from (non Covid related) general and specific grants rises in line with forecast CPI;
  - (d) that the underlying impact of any local government funding reforms is neutral;
  - (e) that underlying net income from Business Rates (excluding temporary Covid impacts) rises in line with forecast CPI, and that income and expenditure in respect of the EZ is in line with current forecasts;
  - (f) that the cost of Council Tax Reduction awarded will not substantially exceed forecasts, and the underlying tax base (excluding temporary Covid impacts) will continue to grow as anticipated;
  - (g) that the pressure on the High Needs Block is met from within the Dedicated Schools Grant;
  - (h) that cash limited non-pay budgets will be managed so as to absorb any price inflation not specifically provided for in 2021/22 and any inflationary pressures in 2022/23 and 2023/24 will be no more than the amount provided for;
  - (i) that income and expenditure relating to treasury management activity are in line with forecasts;
  - (j) that there will be no other unplanned expenditure (including any resulting from demographic, legislative or case law pressures) or shortfalls in income, which cannot be met from reserves;
  - (k) that there will be no changes to government policy on maximum underlying Council Tax increases without the need for a referendum;
  - (l) that the Adult Social Care market is able to absorb National Living Wage pressures within the proposed provision;
  - (m) that there will be no underlying change in the level of employers' pension contributions from 2023/24 compared with the current MTFs;

- (n) that contributions to the WMCA are in line with the forecasts in this report;
- (o) that the proposed contingency will be sufficient to cover any additional costs of managing Covid in 2021/22.

34. The assumptions set out above lead to forecast deficits in all financial years. These assumptions are subject to uncertainty and in some cases this uncertainty is significant. Actual outcomes may be more positive or more negative than the forecasts set out in this report. In the event that outcomes are more negative, then action (to reduce levels of expenditure or increase income) may become more urgent. It should be noted that this budget is being set against a background of significant political and economic uncertainties.

### Consultation

35. Thousands of people have taken part in the budget consultation over the past few years. Last year more than 1,400 responses were received after an extensive promotion period through the media, social media and through the e-bulletin. Hard copies were also made available in libraries, leisure centres and at Dudley Council Plus. This year, the council will continue to consult far and wide using the extensive reach it has through a range of communications channels as well as working with partner organisations and community groups to encourage more people to have their say. The results will be reported back to Cabinet in the spring
36. Detailed consultation will also be undertaken with groups identified as being potentially affected by the specific savings proposals, with a particular emphasis on equalities issues. Further information is set out in the Equality Impact section below.
37. A consultation document will be distributed to representatives of Non-Domestic Ratepayers setting out the provisional budget proposals in this report. Consultees will be offered the opportunity for a meeting to be held if there is sufficient interest. Further detailed information (as required in pursuance of the statutory duty to consult) will be distributed in February for comment before the Council Tax setting meeting.
38. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Scrutiny Committees are being asked to consider the issues set out in this report and any related specific issues relevant to their Council Plan and service responsibilities. For this committee the relevant items are those relating to Children's Services in paragraphs 25 and 28, and Appendices D and E. Senior Management will be available at the meeting to address any queries. In framing their responses, the Scrutiny Committees are being asked to consider both the spending and funding implications (including the impact on Council Tax) of any observations they may wish to make.

## **Finance**

39. This report is financial in nature and relevant information is contained within the body of the report.

## **Law**

40. The Council's budget setting process is governed by the Local Government Finance Acts 1988, 1992, and 2012 and the Local Government Act 2003.
41. The Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Financial Officer to report on the robustness of estimates made for the purpose of final budget calculations, and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves and this will be included in the final budget report.
42. The Localism Act 2011 introduced a new chapter into the Local Government Finance Act 1992 making provision for Council Tax referendums to be held if an authority increases its Council Tax by an amount exceeding principles determined by the Secretary of State and agreed by the House of Commons.
43. The Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006 are designed to enable a local authority to compensate employees whose employment terminates on grounds of redundancy or in the interests of the efficient exercise of the authority's functions. Any local arrangements in place must also be compliant with the Employment Rights Act 1996 and the Equality Act 2010.

## **Equality Impact**

44. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 - the general public sector equality duty - requires public authorities, including the Council, to have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act;
  - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't;
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.
45. Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:
- remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic

- take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it
  - encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
46. The legislation states that "the steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities." In practice, this means that reasonable adjustments should be made for disabled people so that they can access a service or fulfil employment duties, or perhaps a choice of an additional service for disabled people is offered as an alternative to a mainstream service.
47. Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:
- tackle prejudice, and
  - promote understanding.
48. Compliance with the duties in this section may involve treating some persons more favourably than others; but that is not to be taken as permitting conduct that would otherwise be prohibited by or under this Act.
49. The duty covers the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
50. An initial assessment of the budget proposals has been made. Where proposals are likely to have a significant equality impact, they will undergo an equality impact assessment informed by consultation with the protected groups who may be adversely affected, during the autumn. The results of this process and any steps which emerge that might help to mitigate any potential impact of the budget proposals on the protected groups will be reported to Members so that they can pay due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty in making decisions on the budget. In making decisions on budget proposals, Members will need to weigh the Public Sector Equality Duty against the forecast financial position, risks and uncertainties set out in this report.
51. With regard to Children and Young People, a substantial element of the proposed budget for the People Directorate will be spent on maintaining and improving services for children and young people. The expenditure of other Directorates' budgets will also have a significant impact on this group.

## **Human Resources / Organisational Development**

52. Proposals in relation to staff Terms and Conditions are detailed in paragraph 27.



## **Commercial / Procurement**

53. There is proposed additional investment in the Procurement team included in paragraph 25 and Appendix D.
54. Proposed savings from increasing the Dudley Town Hall catering and bar offer and income from advertising on Boundary signs are included in paragraph 28 and Appendix E

## **Health, Wellbeing and Safety**

55. The forecast Public Health budget is set out in paragraphs 29 and 30. This report includes proposals for investment in the SCAMs Team to support Adult Social Care and wider investment in the health, wellbeing and safety of the residents of the borough.



.....  
**Kevin O'Keefe**  
**Chief Executive**



.....  
**Iain Newman**  
**Director of Finance and Legal**



.....  
**Helen Ellis**  
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### **List of Background Papers**

Budget and Council Tax setting 2020/21 report to Council, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2020

Revenue Outturn 2019/20 report to Cabinet, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2020

## Funding provided by Government in response to Covid-19

Name	£m	Comment
General Covid-19 grant <sup>2</sup>	25.9	
Compensation for sales, fees and charges	4.6	Latest estimate.
<b>Total Unringfenced</b>	<b>30.5</b>	
Section 31	44.5	Compensates for additional Business Rates relief
SBGF / RHLGF / Discretionary Bus. grants	58.9	Initial allocation to fund grants to businesses.
Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed)	4.8	Up to £3000 per month while closed
Local Restrictions Support Grant (Open)	0.2	Support while open
Further rounds of LRSG	TBC	Further restrictions
Additional Restrictions Grant	6.4	£20 per head discretionary fund to support businesses.
New Burdens-administration funding	0.2	Implementation of hardship funding / business grants / CTR
Infection control - Care Homes	2.9	Ringfenced. 75% to be distributed on a per bed basis, 25% discretionary
Infection Control round 2	2.6	80% to Care homes & CQC care providers, 20% discretionary
CCG	TBC	Support hospital discharges, £1.1m claimed to date
Hardship Fund	3.0	To fund additional Council Tax relief
Emergency Assistance Grant	0.4	Food & Essentials
Winter Grant Scheme	1.1	£170m nationally. Ringfenced, with at least 80% earmarked for food and bills.

<sup>2</sup> £0.8m of Covid-19 grant was credited to the General Fund in 2019/20 and the remainder will be credited in the current year

<b>Name</b>	<b>£m</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Test and Trace Support Payment	TBC	£500 lump sum for those on low incomes
Clinically Extremely vulnerable	0.2	
Emergency Active Travel 1 <sup>st</sup> tranche	0.3	£50k Revenue, £235k Capital. 2 <sup>nd</sup> tranche TBC
Reopening High St fund	0.3	Eligible expenditure to be claimed
Test, Track and Trace	1.9	Ringfenced
Compliance and Enforcement	0.2	Ringfenced to support compliance and enforcement
Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF)	2.6	Very High £8 per head of population. Automatically triggered by Lockdown 2
Additional COMF	TBC	£4 per head per month tier 3, £3 per head tier 2.
Education - Catch up premium	1.9	Academic year grant DSG
Covid Workforce Fund	TBC	For schools once reserves have decreased to 4%
<b>Total ringfenced</b>	<b>132.4+</b>	

## 2020/21 Forecast Outturn position

	Latest Budget £'m	Latest Outturn £'m	Variance £m	Of which Covid £m	Of which Other £m	Comment variance
Chief Executives	0.8	0.9	0.1	0.0	0.1	Other - £0.1m Employee related costs of senior mgmt. posts
Adult Social Care	97.0	102.8	5.8	5.6	0.2	Covid – provider support £2.5m, £3.1m pressures on Dudley Disability Services.  Other - £0.2m Successor
Children's Services	69.1	77.4	8.3	2.0	6.3	Covid – CLA placements £0.5m, Traded Services £0.7m, Schools Trading accounts £0.8m.  Other - £3.4m CLA Placements, £1.3m Home to School Transport, £0.8m Successor, £0.8m consultants/agency.
Health and Wellbeing	2.9	3.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	Covid – Foodbanks £0.1m
Finance and Legal Services	3.6	3.9	0.3	0.6	-0.3	Covid - £0.6m loss of income including summons income  Other - Elections fallow year (£0.3m) saving
Commercial and Customer Services	0.7	5.2	4.5	4.1	0.4	Covid – PPE £2.0m, Regional Mortuary £0.6m, ICT £0.8m, CAPA events £0.4m, Registrars £0.3m

	Latest Budget £'m	Latest Outturn £'m	Variance £m	Of which Covid £m	Of which Other £m	Comment variance
						Other ICT £0.4m
Housing	6.6	6.7	0.1	0.2	-0.1	Covid - £0.2m Homelessness Other - (£0.1m) vacancies
Public Realm	50.1	51.3	1.2	2.2	-1.0	Covid – Waste collection and disposal £0.8m, loss of income (Permit scheme, s74 notices, licensing, car parks) £1.4m Other - (£0.8m) Mobilisation savings, (£0.2m) waste and recycling, Oak lane (£0.2m) offsetting £0.2m transport pressure
Regeneration and Enterprise	11.0	15.3	4.3	4.8	-0.5	Covid – Leisure £2.7m, Catering £0.9m, Planning income £0.2m, Local Mortuary £0.2m, Himley and Halls £0.7m, other pressures £0.1m Other - (£0.4m) net saving on non covid Leisure activities, and reduced expenditure in Adult and Community Learning (£0.1m)
Corporate & Treasury	8.2	7.1	-1.1	1.4	-2.5	Covid – investment income impacted by Covid £1.4m Other - Slippage in borrowing requirements (incl MRP) (£1.0m), (£2m) contingency released, pensions over recovery (£0.4m), lower banking transaction fees (£0.1m), offset by additional 0.75% pay award £1.0m,

	Latest Budget £'m	Latest Outturn £'m	Variance £m	Of which Covid £m	Of which Other £m	Comment variance
<b>Total Service Costs</b>	<b>250.0</b>	<b>273.6</b>	<b>23.6</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>2.6</b>	
Total Funding	-250.0	-279.6	-29.6	-29.6	0.0	£0.8m of grant funding used in 19/20. Includes £4.6m compensation for Sales, Fees and Charges
<b>Use of Balances</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>-6.0</b>	<b>-6.0</b>	<b>-8.6</b>	<b>2.6</b>	



## Delivery of existing Medium Term Financial Strategy

	£'000	Comment
<b>2020/21</b>		
<b>Adults</b>		
Demand management / All Age Commissioning within Dudley Disability Services (DDS) - a focussed approach within DDS services to: reduce initial demand, increase self-assessment, identify placements eligible for Continuing Health Care funding, and develop specific all age commissioning projects targeted at reducing costs over 5 years	210	Implemented
Residential Care Charging Fraud Initiative - Tackle fraudulent asset disposal in regard to Residential Care financial assessment and charging	200	Implemented
Redesign of voluntary sector contracts - A bespoke exercise to consolidate a number of existing contracts into a single market opportunity to the Voluntary Sector	60	Part of pressures
Home care / Extra Care (new models) - Development of a transformational model for the delivery of home care / extra care provision in the Borough	140	Part of pressures
Re-design Day Opportunities - To re-profile usage of the Dementia Gateways in Dudley whilst retaining both services	30	Implemented
<b>Total</b>	<b>640</b>	
<b>Children's</b>		
Children's Transport – Implement new contracts and route management, to ensure services are safe and efficient	360	Part of pressures
Contact Centres - Reviewing the delivery of Family Contact for Children Looked After and Post Adoption support to ensure that the service is delivered effectively, efficiently and offers value for money	30	Part of pressures
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	
<b>Regeneration and Enterprise</b>		
Dudley Town Hall - increase the catering and bar offer.	50	Delayed
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	

Where savings have been partly implemented or delayed, the financial impact is reflected in the 20/21 outturn forecast in Appendix B or is being met from directorate earmarked reserves.

## Spending Pressures

<b>Adult Social Care</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
To meet the cost of care for people with complex disabilities and people discharged from the Transforming Care Cohort	1,550	1,550	1,550
Increasing demand for domiciliary care and a basic inflationary increase.	1,120	1,120	1,120
Increase in the cost and complexity of nursing care placements	240	240	240
Increase in the cost and complexity of care for people with Mental Health problems; particularly care that is jointly funded with the NHS (Dudley CCG)	230	230	230
Maintaining investment in the Voluntary Sector given the vital contribution made to the Borough throughout Covid '19	160	160	160
Growth in demand for care for people with complex dementia and learning disabilities and rising costs of care.	1,860	3,770	5,700
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,160</b>	<b>7,070</b>	<b>9,000</b>

<b>Children's Services</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Placements for children looked after	3,500	3,500	3,500
Home to school transport	1,300	1,300	1,300
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,800</b>	<b>4,800</b>	<b>4,800</b>

<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Funding to continue the work of the SCAMs Team supporting Adult Social Care	70	70	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>

<b>Chief Executive</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Additional Project, Policy and Performance capacity.	250	250	250
Support to strengthen existing Human resources and Organisational Development structure	60	60	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>310</b>

<b>Finance and Legal Services</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Insurance Traded Service - reduction in school income following the introduction of the Risk Protection Arrangement for maintained schools by the DfE	600	600	600
Additional Staff necessary to meet the increased demand for Legal Services	0	50	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>650</b>	<b>650</b>

<b>Commercial and Customer Services</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
PIMS contract	70	70	70
Known impact of Microsoft price increase at next renewal of Enterprise Agreement	0	80	80
Additional costs arising from renewed telephony software contract	50	50	50
Additional costs arising from investment in new firewall technology	0	0	90
Additional costs when Microsoft Dynamics is moved to a cloud-hosted model	0	60	60
Granicus software- mailshot solution	10	10	10
Procurement Improvement Programme	170	170	170
Additional costs to introduce a rolling desktop refresh programme	0	390	390
Additional resources to support Revenues & Benefits.	110	110	110
ICT Helpdesk weekend availability	20	20	20
Payroll Turnover within DC+ (Front line)	50	50	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>1,010</b>	<b>1,100</b>

<b>Regeneration and Enterprise</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Impact of National Living Wage on outsourced Cleaning Contract for Admin Buildings	20	40	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>60</b>

<b>Housing and Communities</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Recruitment of 5 Police Community Support Officers / Constables in partnership with the Police Authority.	250	250	250
Strengthen private sector enforcement support including provision for travellers' transit site.	50	50	50
Strengthen Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) team (shared cost with HRA) including Victim Support Officer, new ASB case management system and noise nuisance app.	20	10	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>310</b>

<b>Public Realm</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Waste disposal - inflation pressures across the three main disposal contracts	220	450	690
Food Waste collection trial	0	200	0
Additional resource capacity to support delivery of the Traffic Regulation Order Programme	50	50	50
Additional resource required to manage the impact of Ash Dieback (a disease killing Ash Trees in large numbers across the UK). This will be achieved by cataloguing and monitoring the trees condition as well as undertaking necessary remedial works.	30	50	50
Tree Planting - reinstate budget for planting new trees across the borough.	10	10	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>800</b>

## Proposed Savings

<b>Adult Social Care</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Ensure the Disabled facilities grant contributes to associated staffing costs.	450	450	450
New support to Carers contract	50	50	50
Acquired Brain Injury Service - cease SLA with Dudley CCG.	100	100	100
Automation of business processes through Successor social care IT system	50	50	50
Streamline the Lye Community Project	50	100	100
Cease the moving and handling team and transfer functions to Occupational Therapy	50	110	110
Maximise contributions to social care (Fairer Charging)	580	580	580
Glebelands contract remodelling.	30	60	60
Supported Living Package reviews in Mental Health	20	20	20
Review and update the charging policy for transport	160	220	220
Contract out aspects of the money management function	30	60	60
Reduce a Supported Living contract by 50% when current extension ends (Mental Health)	80	80	240
Integrated Commissioning Hub restructure - assume straight 5% saving whilst still creating Cross Directorate / Council Programme resource	70	160	160
Restructure of Mental Health Team and efficiencies from exit of Section 75 agreement.	250	400	400
Streamline of the invoice processing functions following the implementation of Successor Social Care IT system	60	120	120
Continuing Health Care contributions to offset general fund expenditure on complex Learning Disability care	500	500	500
Reduction of 50% of the budget for hospital avoidance placements	290	290	290
Reduce the Residential Care Placement for older people budget by 5% to reflect the increasing shift to domiciliary care.	120	120	120

<b>Adult Social Care</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Residential Care Charging Fraud Initiative - Tackle fraudulent asset disposal in regard to Residential Care financial assessment and charging	200	200	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,140</b>	<b>3,670</b>	<b>3,830</b>

<b>Children's Services</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Reduced contribution to the Regional Adoption Agency	50	50	50
Vacancy review	50	50	50
Removal of low level weekend working	100	100	100
Managed step down from external residential placements	425	850	850
Movement of external placements into internal residential placements	375	750	750
Transfer of children to Special Guardianship Order status	40	40	40
Review of Independent Fostering Agency placements	80	80	80
Review of home to school transport for SEND children	220	220	220
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,340</b>	<b>2,140</b>	<b>2,140</b>

<b>Commercial and Customer Services</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Income from Boundary signs	0	40	40
Closure of Dudley Council Plus on Saturdays	10	10	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>

<b>Regeneration and Enterprise</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Dudley Town Hall - increase the catering and bar offer.	50	100	100
Close or enter into a commercial lease for Halesowen Cornbow Hall	0	0	100
Confirmed success of Accelerated Towns Fund bid, £1m of prudential borrowing debt charges reduced	60	60	60

<b>Regeneration and Enterprise</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Adult and Community Learning - maximising of costs charged to external grant which funds the service, leading to saving on core budget	50	50	50
Estate rationalization - Regent House Dudley	0	50	150
Estate rationalization - Cottage St Offices, Brierley Hill	0	30	30
Estate rationalization - The Mere Education Centre	0	0	40
Reduction in costs, Enterprise Zone Management & skills budget	150	150	150
Bereavement: Memorial Safety Budget	10	10	10
Metro Lead contract not extended beyond 31/3/21, project manager post budget becomes available	50	50	50
Himley – staff re-structure	40	40	40
Bring bars back in-house for Stourbridge Town Hall & Cornbow Hall	0	10	10
Bereavement: Stop locking cemetery gates	30	30	30
Leisure Centres: Options Plus Discount scheme - reduce or remove certain categories	20	20	20
Reduce Dudley Business First controllable budgets - based on 2019/20 outturn	50	50	50
Review of vacant posts/spare hours in CLS	30	30	30
Wider re-structure within Regeneration & Skills following a retirement	60	60	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>980</b>

<b>Housing and Communities</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Housing - reduction in revenue contribution to capital for Housing Assistance Grants	150	150	150
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>150</b>

<b>Public Realm</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Mandatory Works Management System Headroom	20	20	20



<b>Public Realm</b>	<b>2021/22 £'000</b>	<b>2022/23 £'000</b>	<b>2023/24 £'000</b>
Release Bulky Waste Trial growth	50	50	50
Release current headroom for Clinical Waste and review annually	70	70	70
Reduction in the resources required to improve the condition of the Borough's football pitches.	40	40	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>180</b>

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## **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee – Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

### **Report of the Acting Director of Children's Services**

### **Children's Services Complaints: Response Times Action Plan**

#### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update with regards to the response times performance in respect of complaints received by Children's Services.

#### **Recommendations**

2. It is recommended that: -
  - Members note and comment on the contents of the report and improvements in response times.

#### **Background**

3. The annual report providing information relating to all statutory and corporate complaints for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 showed that only 41% of complaints were being responded to within 20 working days.
4. At the meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2020 Members requested the Acting Director of Children's Services submit updates in relation to complaint response times to future meetings of the Committee.
5. The revised process intended to improve performance was introduced on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 2020. During the past few months, the revised process has continued to operate.

The current response times performance shows that since the revised system was introduced on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 2020 the proportion of response times now provided within the twenty working day timescale is 65%.

This shows an improvement on the 41% for the 2019/20 period.

However, it is accepted that work must continue to further improve these figures and regular performance updates continue to be provided to senior managers.

6. With regards to those complaints that exceeded timescales since the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. The main reasons for these delays were:

- Other work pressures – 53% (24 cases) of all overdue cases were as a result of this reason.
- Staff Absence - 16% (7 cases) of all overdue cases were as a result of this reason.
- Complex Cases - 13% (6 cases) of all overdue cases were as a result of this reason

The majority of the cases that were as a result of Other work pressures occurred in the Court and Care Management Teams which due to the nature of their work will always attract the most complaints.

Senior managers will be looking into what additional supports can be added to support this service area.

7. Additionally, to further supplement the work already on going to improve performance, workshops will be conducted on an ongoing basis for managers covering the complaints process and roles and responsibilities.

This work is being carried out in conjunction with the Centre for Professional Practice who are also developing an audit tool which will ensure that a sample of complaints will be analysed on a regular basis with regards to not only the timeliness of responses but also the quality of responses. Key findings will then be shared with the service.

8. Efforts have also been made to obtain benchmarking data from other Councils who are part of the West Midlands Complaints Officer Group. From the limited feedback received it appears that response times performance varies, ranging from 50% to 73% with regards to Children's Services complaints being responded to within 20 working days.

It should be noted that the most recent improved performance appeared to be by Sandwell. After further discussion with staff at Sandwell it was found that process changes along very similar lines as those introduced in August were implemented almost a year ago and performance improved from around 50% to 73%.

However, it was clear from their feedback that improvements were not immediate but achieved by constant application of the process, but more importantly senior managements detailed involvement in the process. This is also the core element to the process recently introduced in Dudley.

## **Finance**

9. There are no direct financial implications arising from the contents of this report.

## **Law**

10. The procedures for Children's complaints, are determined by legislation, predominantly involving the: -
- Children Act 1989, Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
  - The Children and Adoption Act 2002 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.
11. However, some complaints fall outside of the statutory process. This is where the complainant does not meet the requirements to be considered under the statutory process. In these cases, the complaint is dealt with under the corporate complaint process. All complaints received are included in this report.

## **Equality Impact**

12. This report has no direct implications for the Council's commitment to equality and diversity. The complaints policy is applied fairly and equitably to all users.

## **Human Resources/Organisational Development**

13. There are no organisation service transformation implications that require consideration.

## **Commercial Procurement**

14. There are no commercial or procurement implications that require consideration.

## **Health and Wellbeing**

15. There are no health, wellbeing or safety implications that require consideration.



**Helen Ellis**  
**Acting Director of Children's Services**

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## **Children Services Scrutiny Committee – 20th January 2021**

### **Report of the Interim Director Children's Services**

#### **Education Report**

##### **Purpose**

1. To update Members with respect to the following;
  - Education Strategy
  - Interim Ofsted visits
  - Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)
  - Alternative Provision strategy
  - Illegal off-rolling
  - Dudley Virtual School

##### **Recommendations**

2. It is recommended that;
  - Members note and comment on the contents of this report

##### **Background**

###### **Education Strategy**

3. The Education Strategy for Dudley 2020-21 was launched with all internal stakeholders, elected members, schools, academies and Chairs of Governors during the first half of the Autumn term.

It was well received, as intended, in providing the essential framework to all of the borough's education and inclusion work, and a coherent context for all of the other workstreams and initiatives.

4. With this strategy in place, we have continued to build steadily, as much of the work demands a complete change of culture for schools and services, and we need to take them with us, to give them the confidence that this approach will succeed.



With reference to each of the key principles of the Education Strategy, a summary of progress is included below;

5. **As a borough we take full responsibility for ensuring that all our children and young people have high quality education, which meets their individual needs and aspirations.**

- It was made clear in all the launch presentations that we need to challenge as well as support our schools and academies.
- With schools that have been reluctant to work with us in the past, we have taken the lead in developing the necessary relationships, using regular meetings with Headteachers collectively and individually to drive the process.

6. **We expect all our schools and academies to be fully inclusive.**

- A summary of all schools' Fixed Term Exclusions, Permanent Exclusions and Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP) data has been sent to secondary Headteachers and inclusion is a regular item on meeting agendas. As above, the focus so far has been on cultural change but, when this becomes more embedded, targets for individual schools will be set.
- The same approach is in place with primary Headteachers, although the later launch date with this group has meant that the work is less advanced at this stage
- Work with our Educational Psychology Service and the Violence Reduction Unit (part of the Police and Crime Commissioner's team) has resulted in plans to roll out a Wellbeing Chartermark in 5 schools in each township from January 2020. This will replace the planned inclusion audits on the premise that, in order to support the development of stronger relationships with our schools and academies, it is better to accredit the good practice that is already in place, and use this to identify areas for further development, than to set targets per se.

7. **We are working to ensure that there is clear continuity between mainstream schools, bases, alternative provision and special schools.**

- A full review of our special school designations is underway, to ensure that the local authority has the appropriate number of places in relation to the primary needs identified on our pupils' collective Education Health and (EHCP). All our special schools will be re-designated according to the four areas of the Code of Practice; communication and interaction; social, emotional and mental health; physical and sensory; and cognition and learning.
- We are also looking to develop and commission Inclusion Centres in a number of our mainstream schools, to support them in meeting the needs of pupils who have less complex needs. The Centres will provide for pupils when they are dysregulated and give sanctuary during unstructured times, but the presumption will be that they spend the majority of the school day in mainstream classes
- These pieces of work will enable the local authority to place more of its children and young people with (EHCP's) within its own special schools, reducing the demand for costly 'out of borough' provision.



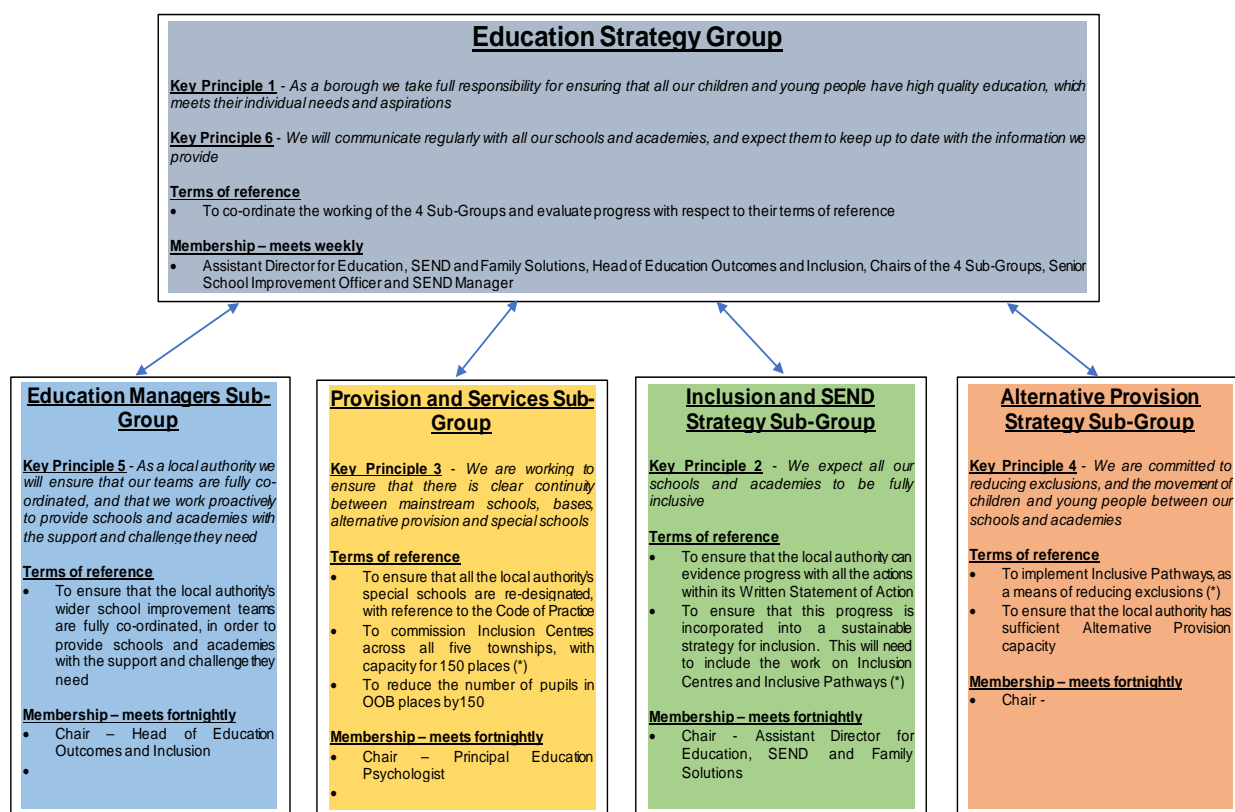
8. **We are committed to reducing exclusions, and the movement of children and young people between our schools and academies.**
- A key strand of the Alternative Provision Strategy is the introduction of Inclusive Pathways, which will provide schools with a wide range of support for pupils who are identified as being at risk of exclusion. An update is provided later in this report.
9. **As a local authority we will ensure that our teams are fully co-ordinated, and that we work proactively to provide schools and academies with the support and challenge they need.**
- The Education Outcomes team is working much more effectively, and the linking in of strategic Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) issues is an important part of this. Weekly meetings are used to discuss individual schools in relation to their level of need and, as a result, we have a more holistic understanding of the issues, particularly those which are less easy to capture by data alone.
  - We then follow up the meetings of our own team with meetings with individual schools, to share our understanding and refine our ongoing work with them
  - Further re-organisation of the Education Outcomes team will be achieved in line with the recommendations of a review of our Specialist Inclusion services, and further to a separate review of Early Years services.
10. **We will communicate regularly with all our schools and academies and expect them to keep up to date with the information we provide.**
- To support improved relationships with our schools, we are now much more transparent in sharing information, such as with the Fixed Term Exclusions, Permanent Exclusions and EHCP's data mentioned above.
  - By also sharing birth rate data, we have drawn up a proposal for additional secondary capacity in Halesowen, in consultation with all of the Chief Executive Officers concerned, and identified 4 primary schools where we need to temporarily reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN) in line with declining pupil numbers in all of our townships, with the exception of Brierley Hill.
11. As mentioned above, the Education Strategy has provided a coherent context for all of the local authority's other workstreams and initiatives and, to ensure that this is consolidated, a new meeting structure is being introduced.

Each of the existing project groups has been assigned to one of the Key Principles of the Education Strategy, and detailed terms of reference are being drawn up.

An over-arching Education Strategy Group has also been established, in order to direct the work of these Sub-Groups and ensure that their work is fully co-ordinated.

The overall meeting structure is shown below.

## Education Strategy meeting structure 2020-21 – draft 1



### Interim Ofsted Visits

12. On 17th March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Since this date, teachers, headteachers and support staff have been stepping up to support pupils, families and the communities they serve. We know that this work continues as staff and pupils return from the summer break.

As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to schools from autumn 2020. These visits are designed to support schools in their important work to welcome all pupils back full-time.

13. **Interim visits will not:**

- Result in any evaluation or graded judgement of a school.
- Change a school's current Ofsted inspection grade.
- Use the education inspection framework and school inspection handbook.
- Judge schools on their response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer terms 2020.
- Require any pre-written planning, self-evaluation or other documentation.
- Require teachers to prepare any lesson plans or examples of assessment, or to put up any displays for the visit.



- Use lesson visits as a method of collecting evidence.
- Involve a general review of a school's policies.
- Provide any evidence or lines of enquiry for later inspection events, once routine inspection resumes.

14. This operational note sets out the process and range of activities that inspectors will carry out in these interim visits, from notifying a school that an interim visit will take place to publishing an outcome letter.

*Interim visits will take place from 28 September 2020 to December 2020 inclusive.*





## 15. The purpose of interim visits

These interim visits are to reassure and inform parents, government and the public about how schools are managing the return to full education for all pupils.

Interim visits will help parents and the public to understand how individual schools are returning to the school's normal curriculum. We will not be evaluating what leaders did during the spring and summer term 2020, when schools were not open to all pupils, but we may need to understand the broad context of its impact on the school.

The lead, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) will write a short letter after each interim visit. The letter will summarise briefly the discussions inspectors had with leaders. This is to provide parents with information about what leaders are doing to help pupils back into full-time education. Letters will not provide any evaluation or graded judgement. They will be published on our reports website.

16. Schools that have been visited:

School	Date	Final Letter Received	Letter
Foxyards Primary	08/10	Y	 10156241 Foxyards Primary School 1037
Withymoor Primary	13/10	Y	 10156601 - Withymoor Primary
Sycamore SSS	13/10	Y	 10156665 Sycamore Stort Stay PRU 1347
Peters Hill Primary	15/10	Y	 10156602 - Peters Hill Primary - 103791
Netherbrook Primary	22/10	N	
Hob Green Primary	03/11	N	



All schools stated that HMI followed the agenda as set out in the following document <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/interim-phase-maintained-schools-and-academies>

17. **General**

- Visits were supportive and sensitive to the needs of the school.
- All visits started at approximately 10am and were finished by 2.30 to 2.45pm.
- Feedback was constant throughout the day – no ‘final’ meeting.
- No visits to classes or walks around school.
- No conversations with staff, pupils, Governors, Local Authority or the Multi Academy Trust. Inspectors spoke only with Headteacher / Senior Leadership Team and Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- A lot of questions were repetitive as they had to be QA’d by different people
- Very keen to look at positives as well.

18. **Priorities for HMI Visit.**

**Response to COVID.**

- What are your school priorities post lockdown?
- What has been the Impact on staff /pupils?
- What were the challenges?
- How did you communicate with parents?
- Have you accessed any external support?

19. **Safeguarding**

- What were your procedures during lockdown?
- What has been the impact on staff / pupils?
- How has the Safeguarding policy changed since lockdown?
- If there has been any recruitment since during lockdown or after schools last inspection – HMI looked at the schools Single Central Record for those individuals
- Has anyone been employed after 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 – this was checked?

20. **Behaviour and Attendance**

- Staff attendance during and after lockdown.
- Pupil attendance after lockdown – strategies.
- Part timetables.
- How many Elective Home Education pupils pre/post lockdown.
- Remote learning for those pupils / bubbles that have been isolating; what have you done and what are the challenges?

- What routines / expectations have been implemented differently. How have these affected staff/children?
- How has the behaviour policy changed since lockdown?
- How have the learning behaviours of children changed since return to school?

## 21. **Curriculum**

- Longest meeting for all schools.
- Where are the gaps in children's learning; how are you planning to close them?
- Which children have you identified as having gaps and have you had a chance to baseline?
- What have you returned to / not returned to and why? (At the moment).
- What has been the impact on the curriculum post lockdown?
- How are you allocating 'Catch-Up' premium?
- Remote learning; what will you do if lockdown happens again?

## **Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)**

## 22. **Leadership and Governance**

- The Special Educational Needs and Disability Management Team remains in place: This has ensured robust management oversight and responsibility for the oversight of cases.
- Using Virtual Special Educational Needs and Disability handbook to drive send compliance with statutory duties.
- Focus on early years and targeted post 16 and post 19 has enabled timely decisions for placement and cessation of EHCP's no longer required.
- Weekly Multi- agency Panels for decision making; managing accountability for placement decisions, resources across health, social care and education to facilitate joint and tripartite funding arrangements

## 23. **Capacity and Staffing**

- 10 of 11 permanent case officers in post. The last to join was on the 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2021.
- A Senior permanent post has been unsuccessful in being appointed twice (August 20<sup>th</sup> and Nov 20<sup>th</sup> 2020).
- The Special Educational Needs and Disability Advanced Practitioner Post was recruited to on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020
- Increase in Business Support to administer Panels and manage invoicing and financial processes.
- Tribunal officer and the Local Offer and Participation Officers have been in post since the summer.

## 24. Performance Management

- At the end of September 2652 active EHCP'S with an average caseload across 12 persons is 221 cases -but with 1 staff down, the case load can be up to 241 per person.
- The Autumn term is preparation for Secondary transfers (year 6) to hit deadline by 15<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and also primary transfers (reception) for 15<sup>th</sup> February 2021 in order to ensure children have a school place for September 2021.
- Year 11 and Year 14 transfers for post 16 and post 19 are being worked on in order to meet the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 deadline.
- A Special Educational Needs and Disability System Governance group has been set up to review and monitor quality of the Special Educational Needs and Disability data system.
- Cross referencing data quality with other agencies such as the virtual school, Connexions, Colleges to ensure relevant data reflects Special Educational Needs and Disability data.
- Work with adults has strengthened the Performing for Adulthood and the multi-agency approach with stakeholders is supporting both the Performing for Adulthood strategy and development of the Performing for Adulthood Performance dashboard

## 25. Quality of Practice

- EHCP format has been revised and shared with relevant stakeholders ready to be implemented following the 'Good Plan' event and ECHP checklist process has been agreed.
- Multi-agency Audit process have been developed to be undertaken on a quarterly basis.
- Internal monthly audit program being developing using the Centre for Professional Practice quality assurance framework.
- Special Educational Needs and Disability training held on EHCP format and content requirements with health and social care.
- Multi- agency meetings held with stakeholders and agreed to improve practice.
- Termly meetings with Special School Heads were in place to improve case management and processes.
- Working on the Special Educational Needs and Disability tool kit to provide resources that can be accessible across the 0-25 pathway

## 26. Enabling

- Co-production meeting had been agreed within 20- week process to develop relationship with families, children and young people.
- Working with the virtual school to improve pathways for Children Looked After (CLA) with EHCP.
- Working in collaboration with Adult Social Care about best interest assessment to capture the wishes and feelings of Special Educational Needs and Disability young adults.
- Active participation with colleges and providers about the commissioning of places and developing new provision.
- Multi-agency Communication and Culture group started by Special Educational Needs and Disability and co-chaired by CVS and the Local Authority's Communications Department to ensure consistent messaging across education, health and social care.
- Launch of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Network and SENCo Cluster group to support Heads and SENCo's deliver the graduated approach

### Alternative Provision Strategy Project Update

## 27. Context for the establishment of the Project

National Context (School Exclusion Statistical First Release (2017 to 2018) evidences that of the 14 Local Authorities within the West Midlands Region, Dudley ranks as follows:

- 4<sup>th</sup> highest for Primary School Exclusions.
- 5<sup>th</sup> highest for Secondary School Exclusions.
- The highest for exclusions in Special Schools.
- 4<sup>th</sup> highest Local Authority for overall exclusions

Numbers of Dudley Children and Young people experiencing Permanent Exclusion:

- 2016-17 119
- 2017-18 99
- 2018-19 104

If Exclusions from Alternative Provisions are included:

- 2016-17 149
- 2017-18 129
- 2018-19 134

## 28. **Project Development and Delivery Timeline**

January to April 2020

Development of Alternative Provision Strategy Project Brief informed by Diagnostic Commissioning Paper (3year trend analysis and projected demand analysis).

May 2020

Dudley Leadership Team agreement of Project Brief; delivery of Phase 1 begun through MS Project.

June to November 2020

Scheduled delivery of all workstreams and milestones within Phase 1

November 2020

Projected delivery of completed Phase 1

## 29. **Project Brief**

Objectives

1. **Establish demand-led place planning:** To provide diagnostic assessment of demand for 6th day provision in order to commission Alternative Provision for those children and young people who experience permanent exclusion and those at risk of exclusion.
2. **Commissioning:** To commission sufficiently broad-ranging Alternative Provision that is fit for purpose in meeting needs, improving outcomes and post-16 Education Employment Training and is judged to be of a good standard through the Common Inspection Framework and ongoing Government Review of AP.
3. **Establish robust Preventative Pathways:** To ensure all settings have equitable access to preventative pathways (including a Special Educational Needs Graduated Response), in order that all Children and Young People experience consistent and inclusive education that is sufficiently informed to meet needs.
4. **Remove current barriers:** To address current issues by removing barriers to educational access for permanently excluded children and young people across all Key Stages, in order to ensure that the Local Authority fulfils its Statutory Duties in ensuring all children and young people are safeguarded and achieving.

### 30. Desired Outcomes

- Sufficient appropriate commissioned Alternative Provision by the Local Authority (for 6<sup>th</sup> Day+ following a Permanent Exclusion) and Schools (Inclusive/preventative) to ensure that no pupil is without a place
- Children and Young People who are permanently excluded/at risk of permanent exclusion are Children Missing Education.
- Schools routinely commission DFE-registered good Alternative Provision as part of inclusive pathways to reduce the need to permanently exclude.
- All settings (including Alternative Providers) have equitable access to preventative pathways.
- LA fulfilment of Statutory Duties in Safeguarding and provision of Education for all Children and Young People.
- Dudley is recognised as an Inclusive Local Authority.

### 31. **Project Progress to Date (Milestone completion)**

Project Milestones delivered:

- Diagnostic assessment of Alternative Provision demand complete and informing commissioning.
- Safeguarded Continuing Learning implemented for Permanently Excluded Children Missing Education.
- Alternative Provision Strategic Policy Consultation complete.
- Traded Services Review complete.
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis of commissioned Key Stage 4 AP complete.
- Current Key Stage 4 AP support costing transparent and available to Alternative Provision Governance.
- Key Stage 4 Contract Variations approved and commissioning for 2020-2021 complete.
- Universal Starting Points Resource Bank available for all schools and settings (Revolution Portal).
- Dudley Supplementary Exclusions Guidance published for all settings
- Year 11 Pupil Placement Standard Operating Procedure and Fair Access Panel Protocols reviewed, consulted on and implemented.

32. Milestones to deliver by end of Autumn Term 2020:

- Alternative Provision Strategic Policy 2020-2021 and Alternative Provision Access Protocols published.
- Inclusive Pathways established and Inclusive Pathways Guidance published to support implementation.
- Effective contractual commissioning of Cherry Tree Learning Centre (Academy Pupil Referral Unit including Home and Hospital Education Service).
- Effective Service Level Agreement established for Sycamore Short Stay School commissioning (Key Stage 1-3 Pupil Referral Unit).
- Update of Headteacher and Governor Exclusions Training Programme to include Dudley Supplementary Exclusions and Inclusive Pathways Guidance (delivery to commence January 2021).

33. **Alternative Provision Strategy Phase 2 (December 2020 to September 2021)**

Work for the remainder of the financial year includes:

December 2020

MS Project schedule to be developed for all workstreams and milestones incorporating:

- Tender and Procurement of AP for the next 5 years.
- Phase 1 impact evaluation and monitoring.

January 2021

Approval to tender document signed off. Market Testing event and finalisation of service specification for AP lots to be tendered.

February 2021

Service specification approved. Tender pack written and approved. Tender documents published.

March 2021

Following tender closure: Tender evaluation process, interviews, decision to award and approval.

34. **Statement on Illegal Off-rolling**

The OFSTED education inspection framework sets out an expectation for the judgement of leadership and management in a school that they do not allow or engage in gaming or off-rolling of students.



35. It goes on to explain that “There is no legal definition of ‘off-rolling’. However, we (OFSTED) define ‘off-rolling’ as the practice of removing a learner from the provider’s roll without a formal, permanent exclusion or by encouraging a parent to remove their child, when the removal is primarily in the interests of the provider rather than in the best interests of the learner. Off-rolling in these circumstances is a form of ‘gaming’.
36. In Dudley there are no confirmed cases of illegal off-rolling. Local Authority officers in the Education Investigation Service monitor all notifications of removing students from roll, via a ‘Regulation 8 referral’, this referral aligns to Regulation 8 of The Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 which specified the legal reasons when a student can be removed from a school roll. If an officer suspects a school of encouraging a parent to remove their child to another school or elective home education, they will either investigate the incident or refer the case to the officer for Elective Home Education and Gypsy Roma Travellers services for further investigation with the parties involved.
37. A recent incident came to light where it had been identified that a number of Year 7 students who had failed to attend the school in September had not been put on roll by Beacon Hill, this matter was discussed with the schools Designated Safeguarding lead who raised the issue with their Senior Leadership Staff, and the school worked closely with Dudley Admissions Service and the matter has been resolved. All students have been put on roll at the school and non-attendance has been followed up.

### **Virtual School - Summary**

#### **38. Academic Outcomes**

This has been an extraordinary ‘exam season’ where our young people have experienced a great deal of anxiety around their results, particularly at Year 11. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic all SATS Key Stage One, and Key Stage Two Primary aged children, exams for Key Stage 4 and Post 16 were cancelled in March and the grades initially were based on Ofqual data submissions by schools. The DFE announced, on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 2020, to revert back to Teacher Assessment grades submitted to the DFE. Nexus data is not available at the time of this report, and it is unlikely to be so this academic year.

39. There is no data available for Early Years, Key Stage One, Year One or Key Stage Two. The results have been collected from the educational settings for Key Stage Four, there has been no refining to identify the OC2 group (ie those that have been in care for at least 12 months on 31<sup>st</sup> March). There are also two further young people who have just completed Year 11 but are in fact Year 12 so have not been included in this analysis. The data will continue to be analysed to help inform discussions and work with educational settings.

40. The Year 11 cohort consists of 56 young people (28 female, 28 male) with 48.3 % having identified Special Educational Needs and Disability (EHCP 29.3%, SENS 19%). The majority of the group (52%) attended educational settings out of borough.

**Table One: Year 11 (Key Stage Four) Unvalidated Outcomes 2019.20**

Category	Number	%
Eng 4+	19	33
Maths 4+	13	23
Eng 5+	11	19
Maths 5+	9	16
Eng/Maths 4+	13	23
Eng/Maths 5+	7	12
E-Bacc	7	12

41. This represents an improvement on the outcomes from the academic year 2018 to 19 where the young people with English/Maths combined at 5 plus was 6.1% (7.9% in 2017 to 18).
42. The unvalidated data in Table One suggests that young people attending Dudley educational settings have improved on the previous year where the Out Of Borough young people outperformed those in borough. The focus English and Maths in Pep targets will be continued this year, with a further focus on SMART targets.
43. As in the last academic year, there is a cohort of young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability who are following courses leading to Level One or below outcomes. These are very appropriate to their learning needs at this time and can lead to Level Two in future years.
44. The reporting of the Attainment 8 and Progress 8 will not be possible this year. Similarly, the comparative data with other groups, Special Educational Needs and Disability, local authorities and trends will not be made available.
45. The number of young people with no qualifications in the last academic year was a concern. This has been a focus this year with a 44% reduction of the number of young people in this category. Of these, the three young people attending educational settings out of borough, two who attended special schools were engaged in a learning programme that will support more independent living, and the third attended a Free School (Alternative Provision). Similarly, in Dudley, one young person attends a Special School and the second AP.

46. The Pathways Programme has been targeting this group over the academic year. There is a group of eight young people who have followed targeted tuition in Functional Skills, two who have secured a Level Two qualification in Numeracy, two who have been re-engaged and moved onto Post 16 with the remainder looking to secure their qualifications this term.
47. All Year 11 have identified destinations, have been followed up as the new Post 16 term starts to ensure all young people are engaged.

48. **Attendance And Exclusions**

The attendance of our young people over the last academic year was severely affected by the period of lockdown. The new academic year has seen a return to educational settings across the full children in care (CiC) cohort.

There continues to be a priority of ensuring that CiC are not permanently excluded from their educational setting. This work continues to demand strong relationships with schools, a workforce development programme and collaboration with Health and Social Care. The work to reduce fixed term exclusions continues alongside schools and educational settings.

The Virtual School have also extended their emotional well-being offer, complementing the Dudley Lighthouse Links programme.

49. **Personal Education Plans**

The work to develop the quality and impact of the Personal Education Plan (Pep) has continued throughout the last academic year. The number of completed Pep's has risen to 97.4%, with 89.1% being Good or better. The number of young people with no Pep's has significantly reduced to 2.7%.

The e-Pep has been introduced at Post 16 and is being embedded this academic year.

50. **Not In Education, Employment or Training (NEET's)**

The Virtual School, in working with Post 16 young people primarily support those in Year 12 and 13, have a dedicated Education Adviser working alongside the Connexions PA. The pathways programme, linked to a work-based training provider has been successfully introduced to engage young people in this age group.

**Learning Developments**

51. **Arts**

The Arts Link offer has continued to develop on-line. Dudley young people are one of the highest users in the region of this service, and one of our young people's art work has been featured on it.

52. The Arts Award is an ongoing offer via Artslink and supported by the Dudley Arts Ambassador and the Dudley Participation Officer. In the summer term four young people commenced the scheme and these will be completed during the Autumn Term. This scheme is also being offered to more of the cohort, linking with educational settings and the DVS are currently reviewing the benefits of working with residential homes.

### 53. **The Challenge Tuition Programme**

The Virtual School had introduced a range of tutoring opportunities over the last academic year. This targeted and framed approach has allowed a more informed programme to be developed to inform work with schools now the young people have returned to their educational settings. As these settings are starting to plan for the introduction of the National Tutor Programme and catch-up funding, the Virtual School is able to offer advice and guidance around the qualities of a number of the tutor companies available. The tutoring sessions therefore have gradually been re-integrated back into the school-linked offer via the Pep meetings. This is increasingly ensuring that all tutor programmes offered as part of a Pep target are linked to the learning offer of the school.

### 54. **Sports Link**

A second strand, Sport, has been added to the collaborative work across the region. The Virtual School have appointed a Sports Ambassador for Dudley and the Autumn Term is being used to plan the introduction of a new programme in 2021.

## **Finance**

55. The Education functions underpinning the Education strategy are funded for 2020/21 from a combination of:

- General Fund Revenue Budget Education - £3.7m
- Dedicated Schools Grant Central School Services Block - £1.8m

Funding to support the Alternative Provision strategy is contained within the High Needs block allocation of £35.2m.

## **Law**

56. The Education Strategy for Dudley 2020-21 was launched with all internal stakeholders, Elected Members, Schools, Academies and Chairs of Governors during the first half of the Autumn term 2020.

## **Equality Impact**

57. The Equality Impact will continue to be considered as the strategy is implemented

## **Human Resources/Organisational Development**

58. The HR/OD Business Partner is fully engaged with officers within the Children's Services Directorate to support the delivery of the key principles of this strategy

## **Commercial/Procurement**

59. As part of this report the positive actions building relationships with schools helps with commercial opportunities and has a positive impact on sales to our school customer base.

There are no procurement implications associated with this report

## **Health, Wellbeing and Safety**

60. This strategy is consistent with building stronger, safer and more resilient communities in line with the Dudley Vision and Inclusion plans for Dudley borough.

By creating a more inclusive culture and practice, we will have less disruption to children's and young people's education, creating a more stable environment for our young people to be able to thrive and achieve. By having greater partnership working with options to provide the most suitable support to some of our most vulnerable children, an informed and inclusive model will improve the health & wellbeing and life chances of Dudley's children and young people. Ultimately, building greater resilience in our future community residents, in turn improving their physical, and emotional health for the future.

61. Monitoring should take place of the inclusive strategy and practice to ensure the best outcomes are being achieved and the capacity within settings is managed.



**Helen Ellis**  
**Acting Director of Children's Services**

### **Contact Officer:**

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4 November 2020

Zoey Lowe  
Foxyards Primary School  
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DY4 8BH

Dear Mrs Lowe

### **Ofsted visit to Foxyards Primary School**

Following my visit with Chris Stevens, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 9 October 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the visit's findings. Thank you for the time you made available to discuss your actions since September 2020, when the government expected all schools to open fully to all pupils.

This visit was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for visiting schools while routine inspections are temporarily suspended.

Ofsted's visits to schools during the autumn term are not inspections. We are not giving graded judgements. We did not undertake the usual range of inspection activities and were unable to check other sources of evidence, such as visits to lessons or looking at pupils' work. The content of this letter gives an overview of our discussions about what has happened in your school this term.

During the visit, we spoke to you, the deputy headteacher and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust. We did not speak to pupils because of the protective measures in place.

## Context

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's education system is managing the return to full education for pupils following an extended break in formal schooling due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

In undertaking this focused work, HMI are visiting a broad range of schools. HMI will visit a sample of:

- approximately 1,200 schools across all Ofsted grades (outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate)
- maintained schools, academies and free schools, special schools and centres of alternative provision, including those in cities, and coastal, town or rural communities.

The information from this visit will feed into Ofsted's national reporting so that the insights can be shared with the government and the education sector. We did not find any significant concerns during the visit. In such a case, an inspection report would be published on our website and available to parents and carers.

We did not consider your response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer terms 2020, when the school was not open to all pupils.

## From this visit, inspectors noted that:

- The school reopened to all pupils on 1 September 2020. From this date, pupils were expected to attend full time, except for some pupils with specific needs.
- Overall attendance for the term is very slightly below what you would normally expect, due to some families taking holidays that they were unable to take during the lockdown period.
- Pupils are studying their usual subjects, with some adjustments across the school. For example, four pupils in Years 3 and 4 are currently not being taught modern foreign languages. You told us that this is so these pupils can focus on their literacy and mathematics skills. You plan to return to the teaching of all subjects by summer 2021. The school is offering extra-curricular activities and continues to provide its wrap-around care for pupils before and after school.
- You are using information about what pupils currently know and understand in reading and mathematics to target support differently in different year groups. For example, in early years you are focusing on children's communication and language skills. In Year 2, the focus is on pupils' phonics knowledge. In Years 5 and 6, you are prioritising the teaching of number work and the application

of times tables. You told us that your checks and observations have found these to be priority areas after the COVID-19 lockdown.

- You are using blended learning, a mixture of video lessons and work packs to support pupils who are self-isolating. The work provided is in line with this term's classroom work. The school has purchased extra computer resources to ensure that pupils can access this work from home if needed.

Thank you again for contributing to this important national work. The views and experiences you have shared will help to inform future policy.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dudley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Heather Phillips  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**



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3 November 2020

Alison Wootton  
Headteacher  
Withymoor Primary School  
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Brierley Hill  
Dudley  
West Midlands  
DY5 2BH

Dear Mrs Wootton

### **Ofsted visit to Withymoor Primary School**

Following my visit with Jonathan Leonard, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 13 October 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the visit's findings. Thank you for the time you made available to discuss your actions since September 2020, when the government expected all schools to open fully to all pupils.

This visit was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for visiting schools while routine inspections are temporarily suspended.

Ofsted's visits to schools during the autumn term are not inspections. We are not giving graded judgements. We did not undertake the usual range of inspection activities and were unable to check other sources of evidence, such as visits to lessons or looking at pupils' work. The content of this letter gives an overview of our discussions about what has happened in your school this term.

During the visit, we spoke to your deputy headteacher, who is also responsible for safeguarding, two assistant headteachers, the inclusion manager and the business administrator. We did not speak to pupils because of the protective measures in place.

## Context

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's education system is managing the return to full education for pupils, following an extended break in formal schooling due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

In undertaking this focused work, HMI are visiting a broad range of schools. HMI will visit a sample of:

- approximately 1,200 schools across all Ofsted grades (outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate)
- maintained schools, academies and free schools, special schools and centres of alternative provision, including those in cities, and coastal, town or rural communities.

The information from this visit will feed into Ofsted's national reporting so that the insights can be shared with the government and the education sector. We did not find any significant concerns during the visit. In such a case, an inspection report would be published on our website and available to parents and carers.

We did not consider your response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer terms 2020, when the school was not open to all pupils.

## From this visit, inspectors noted that:

- The school opened to all pupils on 3 September 2020. Children in the Reception class had a phased return until 16 September 2020.
- Leaders told us that pupils' attendance is broadly in line with the normal attendance for this time of year.
- Pupils across the school are studying all of the usual subjects. You anticipate all pupils will return to their full curriculum by spring 2021. You have changed some aspects of practical subjects. Some school clubs have resumed but educational visits and non-essential visitors are currently suspended.
- Teachers are carrying out assessment checks in English and mathematics in Years 1 to 6. You intend to use this information to teach the things pupils have missed and provide support for any pupils who may have fallen behind.
- Leaders told us that reading is a whole-school priority. Additional teaching time for phonics has been introduced for some pupils in Year 1. You expect all pupils to read regularly and books are sent home for pupils to practise.
- Teachers are assessing pupils' mathematical understanding to check their knowledge and skills. Leaders have decided to focus on pupils' reasoning skills.

Leaders said that pupils with special educational needs have been more successful with remote learning in mathematics than in English.

- Leaders have prioritised history, geography and science this year in the wider curriculum. Teachers are covering any missed content as it arises and modifying how they teach some aspects. For example, science experiments are teacher led rather than pupils investigating in groups.
- You have recently adopted a digital resource to support remote learning and have used this for pupils who are self-isolating. Curriculum content mirrors that provided for other pupils in school. You plan to extend online learning, should this be needed in the future, and ensure that all pupils have access to the necessary equipment.

Thank you again for contributing to this important national work. The views and experiences you have shared will help to inform future policy.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dudley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

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6 November 2020

Steve Derham  
Headteacher  
Sycamore Short Stay School  
Old Farm Estate  
Dudley  
DY1 3QE

Dear Mr Derham

### **Ofsted visit to Sycamore Short Stay School**

Following my visit with Chris Pollitt, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 13 October 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the visit's findings. Thank you for the time you made available to discuss your actions since September 2020, when the government expected all schools to open fully to all pupils.

This visit was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for visiting schools while routine inspections are temporarily suspended.

Ofsted's visits to schools during the autumn term are not inspections. We are not giving graded judgements. We did not undertake the usual range of inspection activities and were unable to check other sources of evidence, such as visits to lessons or looking at pupils' work. The content of this letter gives an overview of our discussions about what has happened in your school this term.

During the visit, we spoke to the senior leadership team and deputy leader responsible for safeguarding. We did not speak to pupils because of the protective measures in place.

### **Context**

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's education system is managing the return to full education for pupils, following an extended break in formal schooling due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

In undertaking this focused work, HMI are visiting a broad range of schools. HMI will visit a sample of:

- approximately 1,200 schools across all Ofsted grades (outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate)
- maintained schools, academies and free schools, special schools and centres of alternative provision, including those in cities, and coastal, town or rural communities.

The information from this visit will feed into Ofsted's national reporting so that the insights can be shared with the government and the education sector. We did not find any significant concerns during the visit. In such a case, an inspection report would be published on our website and available to parents and carers.

We did not consider your response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer terms 2020, when the school was not open to all pupils.

**From this visit, inspectors noted that:**

- The school opened for the start of the autumn term on 3 September 2020. Pupils were admitted over a two-day phased period. The school opened for all pupils on 7 September. You told us that some pupils will remain on part-time timetables until other alternative provision is in place to support their full-time return to school.
- There are individual plans in place to support each pupil's return to school. You work with families and specialist external agencies to support and maintain pupils' attendance. Attendance comparisons with previous years are difficult to make as the school is a short stay provision.
- Most pupils who join the school have had prolonged periods out of education. A number of pupils have joined the school during the lockdown period. You have used a range of assessments to identify gaps in pupils' learning, including in reading, English, mathematics and science. This information is used to develop individual learning plans. Pupils' social and emotional needs are also assessed to identify any additional pastoral support they may need.
- Assessments of pupils' phonic and reading skills have been completed in all year groups. Teaching is based on these assessments. All pupils read every day in school and have weekly group reading sessions. Where needed, additional one-to-one reading support is provided.
- In mathematics, you assess where pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding. The mathematics curriculum is focused on the gaps identified.
- Timetables and classroom organisation have been adapted so that pupils can study the usual range of subjects. This includes practical subjects such as music, food technology and physical education. However, pupils are not able

to go swimming because the facilities they use are not open. In addition, pupils are currently not able to access the outdoor education provision.

- You have developed a range of remote learning resources for pupils, including online learning and paper-based work packs. Due to the different needs of each pupil, you have provided each pupil with an individualised package of remote learning. You provide parents with guidance and information about the home learning resources. You are intending to continue this remote learning as and when required.

Thank you again for contributing to this important national work. The views and experiences you have shared will help to inform future policy.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dudley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ann Pritchard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

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3 November 2020

Simon Duncan  
Headteacher  
Peters Hill Primary School  
Peters Hill Road  
Amblecote  
Brierley Hill  
West Midlands  
DY5 2QH

Dear Mr Duncan

### **Ofsted visit to Peters Hill Primary School**

Following my visit with Heather Simpson, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 15 October 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the visit's findings. Thank you for the time you made available to discuss your actions since September 2020, when the government expected all schools to open fully to all pupils.

This visit was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended) and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for visiting schools while routine inspections are temporarily suspended.

Ofsted's visits to schools during the autumn term are not inspections. We are not giving graded judgements. We did not undertake the usual range of inspection activities and were unable to check other sources of evidence, such as visits to lessons or looking at pupils' work. The content of this letter gives an overview of our discussions about what has happened in your school this term.

During the visit, we spoke to you, two deputy headteachers, and the school safeguarding officer. We did not speak to pupils because of the protective measures in place.

### **Context**

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's education system is managing the return to full

education for pupils, following an extended break in formal schooling due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

In undertaking this focused work, HMI are visiting a broad range of schools. HMI will visit a sample of:

- approximately 1,200 schools across all Ofsted grades (outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate)
- maintained schools, academies and free schools, special schools and centres of alternative provision, including those in cities, and coastal, town or rural communities.

The information from this visit will feed into Ofsted's national reporting so that the insights can be shared with the government and the education sector. We did not find any significant concerns during the visit. In such a case, an inspection report would be published on our website and available to parents and carers.

We did not consider your response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer terms 2020, when the school was not open to all pupils.

### **From this visit, inspectors noted that:**

- The school opened to all pupils in Years 1 to 6 on 3 September 2020. Children in the early years started on 17 September 2020.
- Leaders told us that attendance is above normal for this time of year.
- All pupils are studying their usual range of subjects. Leaders have changed some activities. For example, in physical education, you have decided to pause the teaching of swimming. You plan to return pupils to their full curriculum by summer term 2021.
- Teachers are checking pupils' knowledge in lessons. You are planning to test pupils in mathematics and English later in the term.
- Teachers have identified younger pupils who are being supported with their reading. You have introduced an additional daily phonics lesson for all pupils in Years 1 and 2. Your aim is that these additional sessions will help pupils to catch up.
- Leaders told us that teachers' checks in mathematics have shown gaps in pupils' knowledge of place value. In addition, you told us pupils are struggling to remember their times tables. You aim to support pupils in mathematics by increasing the opportunities they have to revise and practise number skills.
- Teachers have changed planning in other subjects to cover key content missed in the summer term. For example, Year 5 pupils had an 'electricity day' that covered content from Year 4 science.



- Leaders have recently introduced a digital platform for pupils to use at home. Teachers are using this resource to set homework. You intend for pupils to use this digital platform to access remote lessons in all subjects, if needed in the future.

Thank you again for contributing to this important national work. The views and experiences you have shared will help to inform future policy.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dudley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Leonard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**