

**GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Wednesday, 1 November 2017**

**PRESENT:** Councillor B Oliphant (Chair)  
Councillor(s): L Caffrey, B Clelland, S Craig, A Geddes,  
M Hall, L Kirton, E McMaster and P Craig

**CO-OPTED MEMBERS** Maveen Pereira and Sasha Ban

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillor(s): G Haley and N Weatherley

**F27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Thompson, Cllr McCartney, Cllr Mullen, Cllr Bradford and Cllr Davison.

**F28 PERMANENT EXCLUSIONS AND THE POSITION OF THE PUPIL REFERRAL UNIT**

The Committee received a report which outlined the issues in terms of the number of permanent exclusions and the position of the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

It was reported that permanent exclusions have increased significantly in Gateshead across all schools, currently Gateshead's figures are above the national average. It was noted that any permanent exclusion is a system failure. In Gateshead every child who is permanently excluded is shown in the figures, however other local authorities have a 'no permanent exclusion' policy where children are not counted as being excluded but are being educated in places similar to the PRU. Therefore it was acknowledged that Gateshead's figures are transparent.

It was noted that since 2014/15 the number of permanently excluded children has doubled and the figures continue to rise year on year. The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) was concerned with this trend and commissioned Dr Jeanne Pratt to lead, with officers and Headteachers, to look at the issue. From the work undertaken so far it is clear this is a complex issue and there is no simple answer.

There is pressure from Ofsted as behaviour is now a factor it considers, as bad behaviour impacts on results. There has also been a change in curriculum requirements which means some children cannot be as easily matched to all children because it is a very academic curriculum. Vocational qualifications, which schools were just developing, are no longer seen as GCSE equivalents. The academisation of failing schools is also an added pressure in addition to the cuts in support areas, such as youth services and education support services, and a 60-70% reduction in the leadership team. All are contributory factors to an increase in

permanent exclusions.

As a response work has been ongoing with the Behaviour Support Service to ensure it continues to provide a good service. However, the increasing figures year on year is difficult because of the challenging and often complex nature of the children involved.

It was noted that Ofsted has deemed the PRU as inadequate due to behaviour and attendance. It was acknowledged that this will always be the biggest challenge in terms of the PRU. The PRU will therefore become a MAT (Multi-Academy Trust) from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018, as part of River Tees MAT.

Due to the increased number of permanent exclusions the PRU announced that it could no longer accommodate any more pupils. It was therefore agreed that any further pupils excluded would be educated within Education Gateshead in order to find the most appropriate educational opportunities and safeguard/

It was noted that the LSCB report was the start of identifying the complex problem surrounding the increase in permanent exclusions. The LSCB wanted further progress and a conference was organised which involved key stakeholders including; YOT, health, education. From that conference a 14 point Action Plan was developed, which aims to ensure there is work as a whole system to take the right action to reduce the need for permanent exclusions, intervene earlier and create better solutions. A Task and Finish Group has been set up and a Registrar is currently working on the analysis and looking at what can be done earlier.

It was reported that currently there are 40 children now off school roll receiving a minimal tutoring offer. It therefore became important to look for a building in order to accommodate the additional pupils. The Corporate Asset Strategy Team identified a number of potential sites and it has now been agreed that the old Ravensworth Terrace Primary School building be used.

The point was made that the Ravensworth Terrace building will be used to accommodate the pupils of Heworth Hall (medically unfit for school) which was barely adequate. The maximum number of pupils who will be attending at any one time is 60, although not all are full time and the building previously accommodated 300 pupils plus staff.

It was suggested that schools are not doing enough to keep pupils in school and therefore all governors should be challenging any decision to exclude within their schools.

It was pointed out that a lot of the permanent exclusions are from families known to the authority, therefore there is a lack of joined up working.

It was questioned why it has taken four months for the Action Plan to be developed. It was noted that due to the conference being held late in the term and the appointment of a new Strategic Director this led to a delay as a teacher driver was needed at that point which was not available. It was also noted that capacity has reduced massively so it is not always about availability. It was pointed out that this

needs to be a year-long approach and not just in term time.

It was suggested that a lot of pupils accessing the PRU are likely to be facing mental health problems, therefore the environment is very important, for example being in a setting away from a main road in a low sensory arousal area, such as the old Hookergate School. It was therefore questioned if in the long term the best location is being sought, not just the best empty building. It was confirmed that it would cost £20-£25million to build a new school and the Council does not have that resource and there is an urgent need to deal with the children here and now. It was acknowledged that a piecemeal approach is not ideal and it is aspirational to have a longer term facility.

It was suggested that the primary position be looked at to see if there is systemic failure. It was confirmed that there was only two primary permanent exclusions last year.

The point was made that this cannot be taken forward until the 14 point action plan is available. It was confirmed that it is a system wide plan, including health, education, CAMHS, providers and the local authority. Work is ongoing to look at who is responsible for delivery, for example some of it will fall within the 0-19 spec.

It was questioned whether the commissioned places to Special Schools include some of these pupils with behavioural needs. It was confirmed that it is not that there are no places at Special Schools it is about pupils not identified as SEN until they get to the PRU. It is expected that as the PRU moves to a MAT the relationship will be strengthened in terms of looking at individual needs of each pupil.

It was questioned how primary schools deal with pupils in order to avoid permanent exclusions and also how LAC are dealt with. It was confirmed that LAC should not be excluded and would only do so if it was the end of the line. Primary Schools are good at keeping hold of pupils and not always getting help in early enough which can sometimes store up problems for later in secondary school. It was suggested that primary schools need to be encouraged to get the right help early on, however it was acknowledged that this is difficult when there is no money. It was also confirmed that any school excluding through the backdoor would be challenged.

The point was made that at disciplinary panels, the impact on Ofsted of exclusions is not considered by governors and it was felt unfair to suggest that. It was acknowledged that this is complex and there is some generalisation and there has been an example of a Headteacher who received a bad Ofsted because he refused to exclude certain children. It is felt that this is an unintended consequence of Ofsted and austerity measures.

It was also suggested that schools are fighting against systems, for example attempting to appoint a Primary Mental Health Worker has resulted in hitting barriers at every point. It was noted that Public Health Team is in the process of procuring the School Nurse contract and this can be added into the contract from December.

A question was received around underfunded SEBD facilities and the concerns of overcrowding and it was suggested that the report be refused as it fails to make

plans beyond six months to deal with issues and that further failures can therefore be expected. The point was made that there will be a service level agreement between the local authority and the MAT around how many pupils they will accept and only when that number is exceeded with it need to be looked at further. It was also reiterated that the Action Plan would be brought back to Committee which puts plans in place beyond six months.

RESOLVED - That a further report be brought back to Committee next year to show progress against the Action Plan.