

Briefing Note

Title: Response to Councillor Questions

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Job Title: Director of Children's Services

Intended Audience:

Internal ☒

Partner organisation ☐

Public ☐

Confidential ☐

Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Councillor Dr Mike Hardacre

1. **Can you outline your priorities for your portfolio area that you want to achieve during 2019/20 – what areas of work would you welcome the support of scrutiny panel members to help achieve them?**

School Improvement priorities:

Ensuring children and young people get the best possible start in life by supporting and challenging settings to:

- enable more children to achieve national expectations across all phases of education
- increase the proportion of children attending Good or Outstanding educational provision
- close gaps which exist for children in vulnerable groups

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Priorities:

- Improve school and community inclusion through developing a Culture of Belonging for children and young people with SEND and their families in order to ensure children and young people get the best possible start in life
- Improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND to ensure that children and young people get the best possible start in life
- Ensure sufficient high quality, early years, school, college and alternative provision placements to meet the city's needs for CYP with SEND
- Deliver the SEND Strategy and co-ordination of the SEND partnership
- Increase independence through the successful delivery of an All-age Travel Assistance Policy and the development of independent travel training in Wolverhampton

School Organisation priorities:

- Ensuring that sufficient school places are available for every child that requires one.
- Main challenge is around the introduction of secondary school places. Demand peaks in 2023.
- Aim to introduce places at minimal cost to the Council.
- Production of a long term strategy for school estate management in the City that encompasses school place planning, introduction of new schools, building lifecycle and maintenance, built around community based planning to ensure that as housing numbers grow the school infrastructure grows with it.
- The majority of children gaining a place in a preferred school (at the normal year of entry)
- Decreasing the number of late applications made in order to increase parents chances of accessing a school place within a reasonable distance.

- Ensuring that school places are allocated in a timely manner, aiming for children to be admitted within 10 days of allocation being made.

Young People participation and engagement

- Maintaining low levels of NEETS
- Delivering positive outcomes for Young People through Black Country IMPACT, Connexions and Wolves at Work
- Delivering Careers Hubs and Careers Enterprise Company activity
- Delivering a Work Experience offer integrated with Wolves at Work
- Delivering the Post 16 plan

Workbox

- Continuing to develop workbox to provide an interactive tool for residents to access support

Wolves at Work

- Ensure that more good jobs are created and more residents into work through Wolves and Work
- Delivering the Learning Communities initiative and develop a pathway through to Wolves at Work

Wolves Apprenticeships

- Working with businesses to transform apprenticeships within the city
- Increasing Apprenticeship starts in the Council and city

2. The Council is committed to working closely with schools and other partners to prioritise investment in our children and young people, particularly those who may be vulnerable or have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Can you give recent examples of work being done to achieve this aim?

The school improvement team meets all maintained school headteachers and chairs of governors in the autumn term for a Challenge and Support meeting. The agenda for this meeting involves a review of the previous year's performance for the school and for groups of children at each key stage, with scrutiny by gender, disadvantage, prior attainment, children with EAL and children who have SEND. A review of priorities for the coming year takes place and a schedule of challenge and support is agreed for each school. Once validated results are published, the team also writes to all academies with an analysis of performance and an offer of support.

Each term, strategic meetings are held with the Senior HMI (Ofsted), the Regional Schools Commissioner (DfE) and the two diocesan authorities (Lichfield Diocese and the Archdiocese of Birmingham). Performance of the city's schools and academies is discussed at these meetings.

Areas of risk previously identified in performance data has been outcomes across Early Years (measured by the Good Level of Development at the end of the reception year) and the performance of children eligible for pupil premium funding across all year groups. As a result of this, two advisory teacher posts were established in 2017 to enable a focus on outcomes in these areas. The city's performance at early years is now increasing at a rate faster than national and gaps are closing for disadvantaged pupils particularly in primary schools. In the West Midlands region, Ofsted have recognised Wolverhampton's success in outcomes for children eligible for PP in primary schools where attainment is above national comparators for these children.

Investment through specific projects has also been brought into the city, including £125k into the Citizenship, Language and Learning team and over £500k into the Black Country for the early outcomes project. In addition, the CLL team support schools to access and manage grants and support available from other sources including the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme and MiFriendly Cities project.

As part of the council priority to develop a culture of belonging, a pilot project is being developed in partnership with the city's three highest excluding schools in order to better understand the root causes of exclusions from a whole system perspective and to target earlier interventions and different ways of working to support our schools to be more inclusive within the framework of restorative practice.

As part of the council's strategy to develop a more inclusive system by increasing the availability of specialist placements in mainstream schools the Special Capital Provision Fund has been set aside to support expressions of interest by mainstream schools to establish resource base provision. This will increase the access to curriculum for children and young people with additional needs

- **School standards and attainment**

3. **What can be done to improve the situation so that Wolverhampton Council and other key partners involved in education of children are working effectively to help all young people to fulfil their potential? What are the key challenges to achieving this?**

The implementation of the council's school improvement strategy over the last four years has been essential in raising standards of performance across the city. Over this period, the proportion of Good or Outstanding schools has increased so that it is now at national levels (86%). Through careful and accurate categorisation, differentiated levels of support and challenge are given to the school and, as a result, the proportions of children attending Good or Outstanding schools has increased from 66% (in 2014) to 83% currently, and there are now over 12,000 more children in schools which are judged to be at least Good (70% of all schools in 2014 to 86% currently). This includes an increase of over 3000 in the last 12 months.

In September 2019, Ofsted introduced a new inspection framework. The emphasis has shifted towards the curriculum and the quality of education, broadening the previous weighting that had been on assessment outcomes. This will mean a period of transition for many schools as they reflect and refresh their curriculum offers.

As the numbers of schools judged to be inadequate has reduced to just three primary schools (two academies and one LA maintained school), and there is now a much smaller group of schools that Require Improvement (ten academies and two LA maintained); this presents an opportunity to support more schools towards achieving and retaining the highest judgement of Outstanding. Currently there are 17% judged to be Outstanding, this has increased from 11% in 2014.

The challenge in ensuring as many young people attain well at KS4 remains a priority.

4. To what extent are maintained schools and academies focused on supporting children and young people considered to be more gifted and talented, at the expense of children with average grades?

There is no evidence that schools are focussing on particular groups of children at the expense of another. For example, evidence at KS2 shows that children in low, middle and high prior attainers achieve well across reading, writing and mathematics; the low prior attaining children often making greater levels of progress than their peers.

5. Following the success of the Parent Champion Volunteers scheme in Wolverhampton – can you give examples of the work being done now or planned to encourage more parents to engage and support their children's education and development?

Parent champions are an initiative that are managed through Children's Services and therefore questions regarding their work may be directed towards Councillor Reynolds.

However, within education, there is the Parent Ambassadors Scheme which supports families and young people in Wolverhampton schools, especially those for whom English is not their first language. The programme trains parents in mentoring and supporting families and young people in the community (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLylex_WDIQ). The 10-week course, delivered by the CLL team, is accredited which means that those who complete it will receive an OCN Level 2 UK qualification. These parents are employed full-time or part-time by schools to work alongside teachers and other school staff as key members of the school workforce.

The school's work to engage parents and carers is exemplary. This starts with effective communication in a wide variety of languages. There are plans to extend this to podcasts, texting and translated newsletters. Three parent ambassadors, who speak the most prevalent of pupils' home languages, have been appointed to engage parents, particularly those newly arrived in the country. Parent ambassadors host weekly coffee mornings, where parents can drop in, get advice and find out about life in Britain, as well as how to support their children's education.

West Park Primary, Ofsted April 2019

Another simple, yet highly effective, initiative has been the creation of parent ambassadors, who act as an extra link between home and school. These bilingual parent members of staff are at the school gates each morning and afternoon so that parents can speak with them. They help to overcome any language barriers or other difficulties that may hinder parents' communication with school. This supportive and listening relationship between home and school helps to build trust. It also ensures that school staff and leaders are soon alert to any problems and can find ways to help.

Merridale Primary Ofsted, October 2018

6. What is being done to provide assurance that Wolverhampton Council is rigorously monitoring the individual performance of work being done by schools to identify and intervene where necessary children needing support at an early stage?

The council's responsibility lies with the provision of high-quality education in the city and, where necessary, working with partners in the Regional School Commissioner's office to intervene. At the moment there is no identified need for formal intervention.

Headteachers and Principals, and their governing boards, are responsible for ensuring children with additional needs receive appropriate support. School assessments are monitored at each assessment point from early years to the end of primary school, through the council's statutory assessment and moderation process. Findings from moderation activities across the city show that schools in the city are accurate in their assessments. Furthermore, applications for assessment for Education, Health and Care Plans demonstrate that schools understand thresholds of need and deliver timely and appropriate SEN support prior to application.

7. In the Our Council Plan it is stated that Wolverhampton has made fantastic progress on improving school performance, with 80% being rated as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted Please provide details of the current educational performance for Wolverhampton schools against the following performance measures:

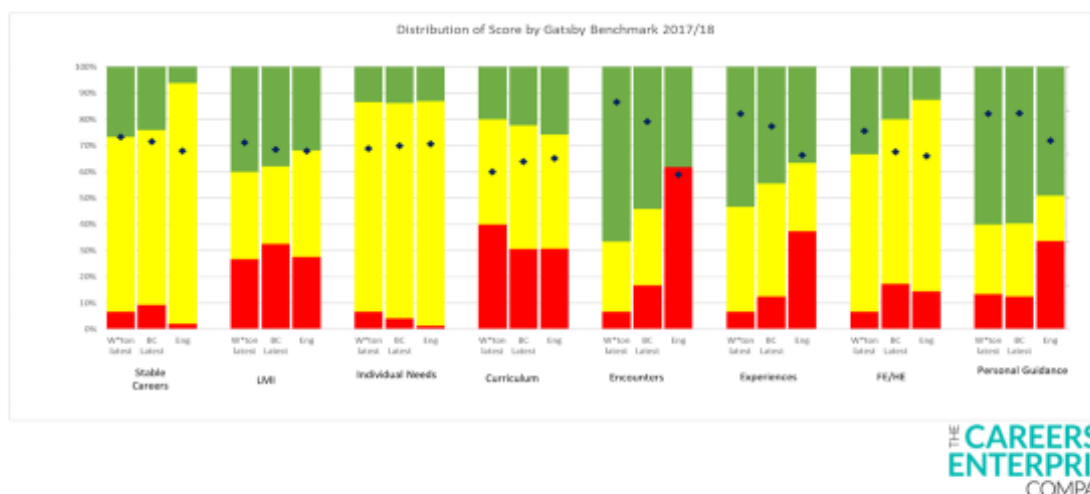
Current performance (Sept 2019) shows that 86% of all schools are judged to be Good or Outstanding.

- a. Key stage 2 attainment gap for reading, writing, and maths between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils
 - o In Reading, Writing and Maths combined, 56% of disadvantaged pupils achieved the expected level (50% in 2017) compared to 51% nationally (48% in 2017).
- b. Key stage 4 attainment gap at 'attainment 8' between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils
 - o Disadvantaged pupils Attainment 8 score was 37.2 in 2018 compared to 37.9 in 2017 (This was 37.1 nationally in 2017 and 36.8 in 2018). This places the city with a national rank of 50, and a place in the second quartile. It ranks Wolverhampton 2nd in comparison to our statistical neighbours and is considerably higher than the West Midlands Average Attainment 8 score of 36.5 for this group
 - o Disadvantaged pupils performed well at Progress 8 with a score of -0.33, (other pupils were 0.14) placing Wolverhampton 2nd in comparison to our statistical neighbours and other West Midlands Local Authorities. This amounts to a national ranking of 42, again in the second quartile.
 - o 23% of disadvantaged pupils achieved a strong pass in English and Maths (9-5) compared to 25% nationally; this is the same as the West Midlands at 23%.
- c. Gatsby benchmark of 8 indicators about school/business liaison
The Careers Enterprise Company activity is supporting schools to achieve the Gatsby benchmarks. Wolverhampton Schools are performing well and exceeding local and national averages.

This is shown in the table below. Wolverhampton is the first column, West Midlands is the second and England is the third column.

The Gatsby Picture in Wolverhampton

Black Country Skills Factory



8. Can you talk about current and future work being done by the Council and other organisations to better identify and support children and young people who display challenging behavior in schools?

This question was answered by Councillor Reynolds at the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel on 25th September 2019, however, to re-iterate:

Since 2018, the Council's Inclusion Support Service have worked with schools to develop the "Getting it Right" approach - a framework for identifying and supporting children with emotional and behavioural needs in schools. All schools in the city have been offered training in this approach, and around 90 percent have taken up this offer. Training evaluations have been overwhelmingly positive. Building on this approach and using HeadStart as a catalyst, we are developing a coordinated city-wide emotional wellbeing and mental health training offer for school staff and other professionals from statutory and voluntary sector organisations.

In addition to providing training, the Council is working with partners to improve support available to children whose behaviour may be challenging to others. We have reorganised outreach provision from our special schools so that there is now single coordinated service. This has resulted in increased capacity within the service which sees staff from our special schools work with colleagues in mainstream settings to share expertise and increase capacity to support children with additional needs. In 2018/19 around a third of referrals to this service were for children with social, emotional or mental health difficulties. For 2019/20 we have identified resources to commission additional outreach support, so that there is more capacity as part of this offer, particularly to focus on secondary schools.

In the summer, the Council was successful, working with the CCG and other Black Country councils, in being awarded the opportunity to be a "trailblazer" site for the development of Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) in schools. These will see the development of a designated team of mental health workers, integrated with both CAMHS and Inclusion Support Services working with a cluster of schools to improve in-

school identification and intervention for children with mental health problems, including those which may contribute to behaviour that is challenging.

9. How many young people have excluded permanently or temporarily from Wolverhampton school during 2018/19 and 2019/20? What work is being done to reduce the number of exclusions from Wolverhampton Schools? What is the quality of the alternative educational offer to children who have been excluded from school?

The DfE data for the 2018-2019 academic year regarding exclusions has not yet been published. The council's own data however show that there were 106 permanent exclusions in 2018-2019. This is a reduction of over 10% from 2017-2018 figure of 117.

Fixed term exclusions increased from 2284 in 2017-2018, to 2722 in 2018-2019.

The city of Wolverhampton has four pupil referral units all of which are graded as Good by Ofsted. This should be seen in the context of a regional average of only 75% of PRUs being graded as good or outstanding.

Children getting the best possible start in life - through the development of a 'culture of belonging' - is a priority for the City of Wolverhampton. A number of workstreams are in place to focus on the reduction in exclusions from school and the need to see these in the context of a whole society issue around youth violence, gangs and disengagement more broadly. In addition to those cited in the answer to Question 8 above, these include:

- The inclusive school pilot outlined in Question 2 above
- The 2018 Review of Alternative Provision- to ensure that there was provision in place for those pupils who struggle to cope in a mainstream academic environment
- Wolverhampton's Children's Emotional Mental Health and Wellbeing Board has targeted school exclusions as one of its key outcome measures so that the city's emotional and mental health services are engaged in supporting pupils to cope better in mainstream schools

• School governance

10. The DfE School Admissions Code, Code imposes mandatory requirements on schools – what is being done by the Council to monitor school's compliance with the code?

The School Admissions Service quality assure 'own admitting authority schools' (academies, voluntary aided schools) Admission Arrangements, to ensure compliance with the mandatory requirements of the School Admissions Code. Any discrepancy is raised with the school in question and if unresolvable locally is referred to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator. To date this has been unnecessary as all schools' admission arrangements are code compliant.

• Strategic School place planning

11. Are there enough places to meet the expected increase in demand in secondary schools in future years? What are the challenges to increasing capacity at schools to meet future demand for places?

Sufficient places are available in the short term. However, the city is in a period of sustained growth in pupil numbers and additional places will need to be found through expensive expansion schemes or by the introduction of a new secondary school. Under the current funding mechanism, the council does not receive adequate funding to cover the costs of expansion schemes. The council has to rely on borrowing to fund school expansions.

Any new school must be a Free School/Academy and is therefore outside the control of the local authority.

Challenges remain in the sufficiency of in city appropriate specialist places. Demand for special school places has increased by 13% over the last three years and a similar increase is anticipated between 2019-2020 and 2023-24. Many special schools who have Key Stage 3-5 provision have limited ability to extend. The council has a ten-year strategy in place to address this by refocusing on more inclusive mainstream provision and increasing the use of resource bases within mainstream schools.

- **School admissions**

12. What proportion of parents received their first-choice admission at primary and secondary school in 2019/20 academic year? What is the overall trend?

Primary (last 3 years)

Academic Year	19/20	18/19	17/18
Offered 1st Preference:	87%	86.7%	86.2%
Offered 2nd Preference:	6.9%	6.6%	7%
Offered 3rd Preference:	2.1%	2.4%	2.2%
Offered 4th Preference:	0.5%	0.7%	0.5%
Offered 5th Preference:	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Alternative Offer	3.4%	3.5%	4%

Secondary (last 3 years)

Academic Year	19/20	18/19	17/18
Offered 1st Preference:	72%	73%	78%
Offered 2nd Preference:	11%	13%	11%
Offered 3rd Preference:	5%	5%	5%

Offered 4th Preference:	3%	2%	1%
Offered 5th Preference:	1%	1%	1%
Alternative Offer	8%	6%	4%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

It is important to note that there is a continued increase in demand for Wolverhampton schools, coupled with sustained and increased popularity for individual schools; particularly in the secondary sector. An example of this is The Royal School, Wolverhampton that received 890 preferences (249 of which were first preferences) for only 33 new Year 7 places allocated into this all through provision.

These factors can have a direct effect on the percentage of families gaining a place at their first preferred school. In addition, the reduction in the percentage level of surplus has also contributed to this.

Levels of demand for educational provision in Wolverhampton have increased significantly in recent years. This uplift has principally been driven by a 24% increase in births between 2002 (2,807) and 2016 (3,476) (ONS Vital Statistics). In addition, housing and regeneration developments coupled with the increased outcomes and Ofsted performance of Wolverhampton schools has contributed to demand.

Late applications are considered after all on time applications that are made. Any parent or carer that makes a late application has less chance of securing a place in a preferred school. There has been significant process review and redesign that enabled the school admissions team to focus attention on areas of the city with historically low application rates. Increased and tailored use of social media, together with targeted chase up letters to parents has been developed to be at the heart of the applications round. The percentage of on time applications is consistently around 97% which is a significant increase from 83% received for 2016.

- **Home to school transport**

13. A 12-week consultation started in September 2019 which proposes changes to the current home to school transport offer. What has been the overall response to date from people who have completed a questionnaire about the proposed changes?

The initial response to the consultation has been limited to date. Responses so far have been in relation to the impact of the demise of Ring and Ride and adult travel assistance provision. Over the next 6 weeks there are a range of consultation events taking place in schools and community centres across the city. The outcomes of the overall consultation will be presented to the Developing Independent Travel's Councillor

Reference Group in November and will inform the final Policy due to go to Cabinet in February.

- **University and College education provision**

14. Where are the gaps in the current offer to support gifted and talented students, particularly from deprived backgrounds, from choosing University as an option? What is the role for the Council in supporting and or signposting young people and parents to sources of career advice and information when looking at university as an option?

Schools are responsible for delivering independent careers information, advice and guidance and are supported in this through the work of the disadvantaged advisory teacher who assists school leaders in understanding how to make better use of the pupil premium entitlement. This includes removing barriers and supporting young people to access advice relating to higher education options. More information about how the Connexions service works with schools in is Question 15 below. The Post-16 partnership group, supported by LA officers, are working together to challenge local universities with regard to their policies for making unconditional offers.

Since the start of the academic year in 2018 –2019 the current careers offer in schools, delivered through the Careers Enterprise Company, has levered approximately £30k into the city. This has provided positive engagements in schools with 1544 students receiving work preparation activities. 2563 students have also been supported to access work experience.

The Black Country Careers Hub (a group of secondary schools and colleges in the area) collaborates with business partners, the public, education and voluntary sectors, to help deliver the Gatsby Benchmarks and improve careers outcomes for young people.

The Black Country's success has been praised nationally. The chair of the Black Country Careers Hub, James Ludlow, Principal The King's Church of England School, Wolverhampton said: "Our careers strategy and provision came out very strongly in our Ofsted report and this is great evidence of the work being done by the Careers Hub, Enterprise Adviser Network, and Careers Leaders. Ofsted were very interested in what we are doing and how we work with The Careers & Enterprise Company and other stakeholders to provide careers education. The announcement of a second Careers Hub is great news for careers education in the Black Country."

Provision in the sixth form has improved and is now good. Students' outcomes are good in vocational subjects and have improved in academic subjects. Students benefit from many opportunities to develop work-related skills.

The personal, social, health and economic education and citizenship curriculum makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development. This includes a comprehensive and very well-planned programme of careers education. The impact of this is that almost every Year 11 pupil who left the school in 2018 moved on to further education or employment with training.

Leaders offer a broad range of academic and vocational courses. Effective careers advice and guidance ensure that students take subjects that are well matched to their

abilities and aspirations. High-quality support means that nearly all complete the courses they start in Year 12.

Leaders provide a comprehensive enrichment programme to ensure that students receive a well-rounded education and good preparation for working life. For example, every student takes part in an activity that contributes to the community, either in school or the local community. They know how to live safely and enjoy healthy lifestyles because they understand the risks they might face otherwise.

Destination information shows that the vast majority of students go on to further education, training, apprenticeships or employment. Students are well prepared for these next steps because their personal, social and employability skills are developed well. Close links with outside agencies meant that 25% of students in Year 12 attended a university summer course in 2018 to encourage studying at university.

The King's CE School, Ofsted Dec 2018

Skills and employability

- 15. The Our Council Plan gives a commitment to developing greater collaboration between our schools and businesses to improve the transition from education to work. What do you think about the current offer from schools and the Connexions Service to help prepare young people for employment and to compete successfully in the job market?**

Wolverhampton has an excellent model of skills and employment support which is being considered by the other Black Country authorities as an example of good practice and one they are now seeking to emulate.

An integrated model exists across Connexions, Work experience, IMPACT, Apprenticeships and Wolves at Work. These services are integrated to enable a coordinated offer to be available to young people right through from school to adulthood. This is really important because we know that many young people 'fall through the cracks' between youth and adult services. This offer includes all the key components which help young people understand their career choices and the world of work, identify and access suitable vocational training, find and stay in employment and includes – advice and guidance, work experience, employment support, in work support and progression. In addition, council funds leverage in significant external funds to support this model. Young people are not 'de-registered' nor do they become ineligible for support – we work across these funding streams to make sure no young person ever falls off the radar.

Connexions have successfully ensured that NEETs and Not Knowns are currently 4.2% which is better than regional and national comparators. As part of their role, Connexions provides a careers information advice and guidance support service across the city servicing the city's secondary schools, PRUs, special schools, alternative provision and elective home education. The team provides a targeted service for young people (13-19 – up to 25 with SEN). The team works with the following priority groups, SEND, CYPIC and YOT young people. Connexions provide one-to-one action planning, CV compilation, help with applying for apprenticeships, support with on-line benefit applications, advocacy for a young person between services, support with transition into employment and training.

Our performance on Impact has been the best in the Black Country. See below for the performance across the range of projects – Impact is targeted at young people who are

NEET aged 15 – 29. In addition, 45% of our job outcomes on Wolves at Work were young people.

This integrated model has delivered the following successes:

- Connexions have successfully ensured that NEETs and Not Knowns are currently 4.2% which is better than regional and national comparators.
- IMPACT has engaged with 3090 young people aged 15-29 and supported 1542 into education, employment or training.
- Outstanding success of Wolves at Work which is getting regional visibility – 4658 into work and 80% sustained in work at 12 weeks (45% are young people)
- 178 new employers have been engaged to support work experience
- 100 residents have accessed work experience in the Council
- Complete transformation of council apprenticeships – spend from £60k to £720k and number of starts 64 to 340. (Additionally, there are a further 130 starts planned)
- Workbox (www.wolvesworkbox.com) -over 394,000 unique visits and over 110 organisations promoting their offer. Over 4000 residents have signed up to receive information on support, jobs and training.