

**Children, Young People & Skills Scrutiny Review Board  
11 December 2023**

Present: Councillor Lonsdale (Chair)  
Councillors Trehwella (Vice Chair), Cllrs Amin, Fowke, Kozlowski  
Pattison, and Wright

In Attendance: Ven. Matthew Trick, Co-opted Member Church of England  
Harman Kaur, Deputy Youth Mayor  
Muhammad Muntasir Youth Mayor,  
Sharon Buckby, Director of Learning, Inclusion & Skills  
Gurmail Nizzer, Director of Commissioning and Delivery

## 24/23 Apologies for Absence

There were apologies from Tracey Churchill, Co-opted Member Catholic  
Diocesan Rep, Suanne Lim, Director Early Help and Children's Social Care Andy  
Smith Strategic Director of Peoples Services

## 25/23 Late items introduced by the Chair

There were none.

## 26/23 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Amin declared that he had school contracts with Derbyshire County Council  
and was a Derby City Council licensed taxi driver.

## 27/23 Minutes of the Meeting on 16.10.23

The minutes of the meeting on 16.10.23 were agreed. Proposer Cllr Amin,  
Seconder Cllr Fowke

## 28/23 Home to School Travel Service Update

The Board considered a report from the Director of Director Commissioning and  
Delivery which gave a high-level summary of work done to improve the quality of  
service to children, young people, their families.

The Board heard that daily transport arrangements are in place for 810 eligible  
children and young people (CYP) from their home in taxis and minibuses to 74  
education settings, as well as 500 other CYP who received travel assistance to a  
range of schools/educational establishments in and outside of Derby.

The Council's Home to School Transport Service (H2STS) works in compliance  
with the requirements of the DfE's Home to School Statutory Guidance 2023.  
The council provided home to school travel assistance for 1,310 CYP aged  
between 05 and 25, including those with Special Educational Needs.

A contract and route planning review was undertaken in January 2023 which evaluated the 334 separate taxi and minibuss contracts used to transport CYP to and from education settings. This resulted in the Council commissioning a single contract for home to school transport for 425 of the 810 eligible CYP, to travel to the City's five specialist schools from September 2023.

A review of the application processes led to the introduction of an online application facility for applications for the 2023-24 academic year. This system provided an opportunity for families to give more information about their circumstances and if their child had additional needs. Feedback was positive, the new system was welcomed by parents as it enabled a quick response and assessment. During the 2023-24 application period 357 online applications were received compared to 2022-23 when there were 91. The system helped the council to achieve more savings by commissioning transport contracts earlier.

In February 2023, after an 11-week consultation, Council Cabinet approved a change in the delivery of discretionary travel assistance for eligible sixth form learners (16-19 years), who were offered a personal travel budget or mileage allowance instead of council arranged taxis and minibuses (unless there were exceptional circumstances relating to their needs). 225 eligible sixth form learners were supported by the Council to attend school or college placements by giving them with either a personal travel budget, mileage allowance or a seat in taxi or minibus.

The Council Cabinet also approved the implementation of a new enhanced Independent Travel Training (ITT) Programme to promote greater independence and preparation for adulthood opportunities. 21 young people had successfully completed the programme and became independent travellers. Further developments planned included continuing to identify more contract efficiencies, such as more reductions in the number of single contracts but maintaining the existing transport capacity and delivery of services.

A councillor asked if the ITT programme supported just 6<sup>th</sup> form and SEND pupils and whether it could also include secondary schools 14-15 years onwards. The officer confirmed this was possible. Councillors asked how payments were organised by DCC. It was explained there was a 20-day turnaround allowed, there were challenges around parents applying in time for school year, so a deadline of June for a September start had been set.

Councillors were interested in how transport was managed to education settings outside of Derby. It was explained there could be several children attending the same education setting outside of Derby, and assessment processes were undertaken, and shared transport was organised if appropriate. Councillors asked if all parents who apply received travel support. The officer explained that the latest statistics were not yet available, but in line with policies any eligible pupils who applied would receive some form of travel support; currently there was not a deluge of refusals. However, families could be disappointed as they were not eligible for taxi transport but were eligible for a personal budget for travel. A councillor was concerned that provision and support was available for parents who had no internet access or could not speak English. The officer explained there was a team in place to deal with any issues and the New Arrivals Team would deal with specific language issues.

The issue of unlicensed taxis or minibuses was raised. It was explained that there was a robust process in place for monitoring and checking of drivers and transport. Any complaints or concerns about drivers are investigated. All vehicles used are licensed and in good condition. Councillors asked about the budget constraints for the service this year. The officer explained that a £1 million saving had been set in the medium-term financial plan; the service was on track to achieve that saving and further efficiencies were also planned. A councillor asked if training for drivers who transported children with health and medical needs was in place, and how often the training takes place. The officer explained the training was delivered by DCC, there was a rigorous safeguarding system in place which monitored and checked drivers and chaperones to ensure training was up to date.

Councillors were interested in how transport providers were selected. It was explained that a full programme of procurement with criteria to be met was in place. The provision was mixed as both small and large providers could be selected.

A councillor asked if applications by parents, guardians or carers had been reviewed and were achieving the desired outcomes. The officer explained that they were not at this stage yet, but applications would continue to be reviewed to see if there were any issues. This was a large policy change, but the feedback so far had been positive there had been no big issues and concerns raised.

The officer was thanked for providing the report.

**The Board noted:**

- 1. The benefits for children, young people, and their families as a result of the improvement activities.**
- 2. The continuing improvements in efficiencies, processes and improving quality of Home to School Travel and Transport Services for children and young people.**
- 3. The Board requested that an update report be provided to them in 6 months, June 2024. The update report should have a particular focus on how the new system was embedding to be sure it was working well, especially with the current budgeting constraints.**

## **29/23 Attendance, Suspensions and Exclusions November 2023**

The Board considered a report and presentation from the Director of Learning, Inclusion and Skills The report provided a summary relating to pupil exclusions, suspensions and attendance for the 2022/23 academic year.

The officer provided a general outline of the legal situation regarding exclusions. A permanent exclusion (PEX) was defined as a decision that results in a pupil not being able to return to a school. The decision to exclude a pupil lies with the headteacher; the local authority and parents must be informed if the decision was made to PEX a pupil who lives in Derby. The council must then provide full time education from the 6<sup>th</sup> day of the exclusion. It was unlawful to exclude a pupil for non-disciplinary reasons like poor attendance or parental behaviour.

The officer explained that there were continued low rates of **Permanent Exclusions (PEX)** in Derby when compared to pre-pandemic years. There were 29 secondary pupils excluded in 2022/23 and 9 primary students. However, in the academic year 2022/23, schools in locality 2 excluded more than in other localities, 26 out of 38 pupils (68%). A higher proportion of female pupils were excluded in secondary schools than males. There was an increase of permanent exclusions in the autumn term 2022, more than in other half terms, one school issued 17 permanent exclusions during 2022/23. There were 2 young people permanently excluded who were known to children's social care in secondary, and 4 in primary schools. There were no young people excluded in secondary schools who were on an Education, Healthcare Plan (EHCP), but there were 3 primary pupils excluded. The main reason for exclusions in primary school was persistent disruptive behaviour, in primary schools it was for physical assault against an adult.

Despite the increase of permanent exclusions in 2021/22, compared to national figures and those of comparator authorities, Derby had lower rates of permanent exclusions in secondary and was consistent with data for primary schools. The data for 2022/23 was still to be published.

In 2022/23 there were 4288 **suspensions** of secondary pupils, 1930 (45%) were issued from one school in Locality 2; 60% of suspensions in secondary schools were for persistent disruptive behaviour. Year 8 pupils received more suspensions than other year groups. Primary pupils with SEND received almost 70% of suspensions issued.

The number of suspensions rose over the last two years due to an increase in the complex needs of children and young people since the pandemic. This included poor social, emotional regulation, leading to poor behaviour in schools. Persistent disruptive behaviour was the most common reason for suspensions. However, almost 80% of primary suspensions were issued to pupils with SEND. These pupils usually had characteristics or a diagnosis of ASD, ADHD or had a referral for an assessment.

At the end of November 2023 10 permanent exclusions had been issued, all to secondary aged pupils. 70% of exclusions were issued for physical assault, mainly against other pupils. 80% had no special educational needs. 83 suspensions were issued to primary pupils, 59% for physical assault, 22% for persistent disruptive behaviour. 1301 suspensions were issued to secondary pupils. Over half of the suspensions were issued from two schools. 53% of suspensions were issued for persistent disruptive behaviour. 39% of secondary suspensions were issued to pupils with SEND.

The Council, schools, alternative provision, and Derby County Community Trust worked together to reduce permanent exclusions and suspensions. An Inclusion Strategy Group (ISG) was established during the Opportunity Areas Programme. There was a culture of "ownership" of school's own pupils, most schools had exhausted all inclusive strategies and interventions to keep pupils in mainstream schools. An Inclusion Charter signed by all schools was established and implemented along with professional development opportunities. During the 2022/23 academic year 1500 school staff attended trauma and attachment training. Also 50% of schools have attended relational training that supported

school staff to manage behaviour and attendance in schools differently. Schools do not tend to exclude pupils with an EHCP or who are Looked After Children (LAC). Behaviour Strategy processes have prevented over 20 permanent exclusions over the last 2 years.

**The level of attendance** in some Derby schools meant that school attendance was one of the priority actions within the DfEs Priority Investment Areas Programme (DPEIA) for Derby. Six wards in Derby were targeted for support. A new DfE attendance monitoring system meant that in future absence data will be more available from schools opting into the system. This was not a statutory requirement for schools, but in Derby 84 schools have engaged in the new attendance monitoring system which provides the Council and wider partnership to develop more “live” data on attendance and target specific actions.

The officer highlighted that research from DPEIA identified the main reason for absence and persistent absenteeism in Derby was due to families taking leave in term time. A Public First report, listening and learning from parents in attendance crisis, captured a range of reasons from parents for non-attendance such as the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, their children’s mental health and a post-Covid influence of long periods of non-attendance being acceptable.

Nationally the issue of illness, mainly emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSA) had been raised, primarily because of a rise in anxiety and mental health needs. EBSA featured mainly in secondary schools, all Derby secondary schools identified between 2 to 3 young people absent due to mental health issues. Primary schools are now reporting that Years 5 to 6 are seeing more children with EBSA.

The attendance for LAC had remained high in 2022/23, there was an outturn of 93%. The high level of attendance was due mainly to the collaboration of the Virtual Schools, schools, social workers, and foster carers/residential homes. To support maintaining good attendance the Derby Virtual School provided a range of training opportunities for school staff, along with interventions that aim to build motivation for learning.

In May 2022 the DfE launched a new framework for national school attendance. Schools and local authorities are expected to: Promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence; ensure every pupil has access to full-time education to which they are entitled and; act early to address patterns of absence.

A Councillor noted that Derby was one of the local authorities where **school exclusions** are low. It was important to keep children in school as it would be better for their future. Councillors noted that exclusions and suspensions had different legal implications, exclusion was a permanent removal from school. The impact of the pandemic was noted, but other characteristics and their effects, such as gender, race, and ethnicity should also be considered. A Councillor was concerned about the rise in exclusions at primary schools as it was important to keep young people in the education as long as possible to provide them with more opportunities. The Councillor suggested that pupils should not be excluded or suspended and would welcome the removal of the practice.

Another councillor asked about the 17 exclusions in 2020-21, where one school contributed just under half of the figure; was this related to one incident or did that school have a high number of SEND children. The officer explained that this was a particular incident that triggered a large proportion of exclusions. The school was in a deprived ward and the behaviours reflected the outside environment. It was important to work with all services to think of different ways to support pupils, the direction of travel should not be punitive. There was a clear requirement from the Code of Practice as to how children with SEND should be supported; there should be a focus to ensure that pupils needs are met in school and not by excluding them from school.

A Board member asked if there was a system in place to establish why pupils were excluded. The officer confirmed there was. If a pupil was suspended a pastoral support plan or individual education plan would be put in place to assist re-integrating the pupil back to school; there would also be links to Family Hubs, mentoring services are in place. The same process would apply to permanent exclusions.

Another Board member asked if more work was being done to recognise early signs of ADHD, and if the process could be improved. The officer explained the work being done to develop the school's understanding of neuro-diverse characteristics. Family Hubs in Derby are working to link up programmes with early years settings and schools. The target was early identification and support rather than waiting for a diagnosis. A councillor asked if there was inconsistent policy across schools, and this was confirmed by the officer.

A councillor was concerned that ultimately the decision to exclude was the headteachers. Was there research available relating to the nature of the exclusions based on school to produce results in relation to performance. The officer confirmed that schools must notify the Local Authority (LA) of the reason for the exclusion/suspension, so that the LA can understand and make sure it was a justifiable reason to exclude. The LA challenges the support plan to ensure it was right way forward. Another Board member asked if there was data available on the spread of exclusions throughout the school year, and if the length of terms had any influence, were there pressure points. The officer confirmed that information could be provided as well as the data on ethnicity. The Board member was also interested in the level of delivery of trauma therapy, the officer offered to provide information on how effective the training had been.

A councillor was concerned that schools had become isolated within their communities, there was a need for them to be central for reasons like safeguarding of children. How are schools reacting in the community? The officer provided several good examples of secondary school involvement like setting up food and clothing hubs. Some schools purposely build staffing to reflect the communities they serve. One school had appointed a headteacher who had family in the ward the school was serving. Work was ongoing with Family Hubs and there was good evidence of moving in the right direction. The Councillor also asked if support was available for staff who had been involved in exclusions. The officer highlighted there was a very strong primary and secondary heads group in Derby enabling heads to support each other, there was also access to LA support.

A councillor asked about **attendance** and if changes could be made to the school holiday structure to enable holidays to be taken at different times to avoid high costs. The officer explained there was a staggering of holidays across the city and county. School attendance was an ongoing problem, there are options available to encourage attendance such as school attendance orders, but it would be preferable to build relationships with parents. Schools were building Parent Pacts to try and encourage parents to keep their children in school.

**The Board noted:**

- 1. The activity for the 2022/23 academic year and performance against benchmarked data.**
- 2. The work undertaken between the local authority, schools, and the wider partnership to support children and young people to attend and remain in mainstream schools.**

### **30/23 Work Programme 2023/24**

The Board considered a report which allowed the Board to study its Terms of Reference and Remit for the forthcoming Municipal Year. The report set out key work areas, issues, and potential topic review subjects within the service areas, for discussion or inclusion in the work programme.

The Board discussed and agreed the work programme set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

**The Board agreed the Work Programme**

MINUTES END