

## Sheffield Strategic Partnership Working Group - Meeting Notes

Thursday 23 November 2023, 11.00-1.00pm

Learn Sheffield (Albion House)

**Attendees:** Stephen Betts (chair), Andrew Jones, Bob Cuff, Pat Butterell, Evelyn Abram, Martin Finch, Dean Websters, Bev Matthews, Martin Fallon, Cathy Rowland, Dave Trouche, Ben Bryant ISOS (online) Evelyn Priestley (notes)

**Apologies:** Jonathan Crossley Holland, Linda Gooden, Nicola Shipman, Fiona Rigby, Shelly Appleby

### Introductions

SB welcomed all to the meeting, introductions were made, Ben Bryant (ISOS) joined the meeting online.

### Strategic Partnership Proposal

**Attendance** - a discussion about attendance as a potential example of a priority area for the city

SB presented a draft 'Learn Sheffield Insight Report: Attendance' paper to the group. Sheffield has seen a sharp post covid climb in absence, as has been seen nationally. The focus of analysis is on overall absence and persistent absence. When colleagues look at authorised and unauthorised absence they need to consider that Sheffield's approach to coding of absence makes it outlying in these measures.

More than 1 in 4 secondary pupils are persistently absent nationally and this is slightly worse in Sheffield. Almost 1 in 5 primary pupils are persistent absent nationally and this is slightly worse in Sheffield. Sheffield is in the third quartile of LAs nationally in terms of attendance and absence, and broadly in line with deprivation. Sheffield ranks 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> of 8 core cities in relation to these measures. The Learn Sheffield insight report suggests further analysis in relation to special school absence and persistent absence.

The hypothesis being tested is that Sheffield is the 2<sup>nd</sup> strongest core city in relation to Ofsted outcomes and would have the 2<sup>nd</sup> strongest attainment if it also had the 2<sup>nd</sup> strongest attendance. Currently attainment and attendance are generally 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>.

The Learn Sheffield insight report also includes analysis of attainment by bands of attendance. This analysis quantifies the extent to which lower bands of attainment coincide with smaller proportions of the cohort reaching expected standard for their age / stage. This analysis currently exists for primary cohorts, with secondary cohort to follow once pupil level data has been published.

Work on the determinants of lower attainment has also been done to enable comparison of the impact of different characteristics. The only two characteristics which are a significant factor at every stage are prior attainment and attendance. The close link between attendance and attainment is obvious, but this analysis provides a clearer picture of the link than has been available before.

The Learn Sheffield insight report will be completed by analysis of the trails suggested in the current version. It will form part of the Learn Sheffield Evaluation which is currently ongoing. This will include analysis of the proportion of young people whose attendance is below 50%, which is significantly below national and core cities. There is also interest in analysing the pupil groups within cohorts, the nature and scale of increased absence within the cohort. Intermittent absence causes a problem as pupils are missing learning at different intervals.

Colleagues discussed whether attendance has got worse nationally since covid. In terms of Sheffield and England, Sheffield's relative position has stayed broadly similar compared with national with some positive and negative changes in relation to LA/Core city rankings, gap to national etc.

Colleagues also discussed changes to Sheffield's deprivation data and commented that attendance in Early Years has always been low and an issue in Sheffield.

Ben Bryant shared a presentation 'AEC Pilot 1' with the group. The presentation will be shared with the circulation of the minutes. ISOS are working with several authorities. One of the priorities that Wakefield have focused on is attendance and highlighted what has worked and what has not worked that could be usefully shared with Sheffield. There have been a number of reports around attendance published in recent months. The value of looking at attendance as a city-wide issue is more powerful than schools looking at the issue in isolation. What has not been addressed is how to address attendance strategically. This is an issue everyone is talking about, but no-one has managed to crack up to now.

Attendance is an area that was agreed by the Wakefield working group partnership. BB shared the importance of being clear about what the role of a strategic partnership is. It is there to speak on behalf of the system to speak on key issues that are not being addressed elsewhere. The local education system speaking collectively on its own behalf.

BB shared key learning from the Wakefield partnership. This included:

- A small, focused group of representatives with a slimmed down number of LA representatives in the working group.
- A selection of key school and trust leaders who are linked into key sector groups, colleges, secondaries and primaries.
- Ensuring the flow of information with the wider networks to inform the work of the partnership.
- Being clear about what needs the groups collective attention which requires a partnership approach.
- This requires ongoing focus year on year on this live piece of work or if it is a one-off piece of work that needs a deep dive.
- Data intelligence, it is good to have a real evidence base using a regular data set updated regularly and qualitative information to test out strategic principles in practice.

In terms of attendance, the Wakefield partnership has tried not to act as a group of critics but to act as a guiding collation. The group is important in underscoring the core expectations on attendance and contributing to the local area strategy about why attendance matters.

The AEC Pilot is now in its second year and is testing cases for causes of non-attendance in school. The pilot is not talking about standard disadvantage groups of pupils. It is looking at who are the pupils we need to have a close eye on and who are the young people we are worried about, those who are out of school more than they are in school.

The group are trying to stop the pupils being invisible and to find the reasons and barriers to non-attendance and understand the reasons behind this at a granular level. The Wakefield group are at an early stage of this work but are starting to see stories of children who were persistently absent and getting them up to 90% or higher fairly quickly. It is about understanding what makes that young person tick and their key adult relationships. Compassion and a holistic approach to see what would make a difference to that young person and their attendance is how the group are trying to address the issue.

BB stressed that it has been important to look at intelligence and being granular by looking at a small number of cases allows this to match the practice of young people rather than big data picture.

There are three broad takeaways from the pilot BB described and were summarised:

1. Strategic partnerships have a vital role to play in fostering whole-system approaches to attendance / vulnerable children – creating the “mandate”, underscoring key principles, ensuring “visibility”.
2. Comparing the local system’s ambitions, principles and strategies with the lived experiences of young people – partners putting themselves in a position to consider, in granular detail, causes and experience of young people’s non-attendance and vulnerability, how this does / not match the system’s overall ambitions, and what action needs to be taken at system level as a result.
3. Focusing on influencing practice – recognising that a strategic partnership is not an operational, “doing” body; using existing capacity within members’ organisations and services to focus on influencing and enabling practice and interactions at a granular, individual level.

The four areas BB has been working with are Coventry, Rochdale, Wakefield and Wiltshire.

SB thanked BB for joining the meeting.

The group agreed that the key message resonated with the working group.

SB observed that a granular approach is difficult when there are a high number of non-attending pupils. Colleagues noted that it is difficult to improve attendance when there is not enough money in the budget and we need to be more creative how the multiple agencies work together.

Attendance is a big issue and access to those who can address the sufficiency and transport issues is necessary to resolve the issues. It is about understanding the component issues and not all of the issues can be addressed by schools. Health, transport and parental involvement is also needed.

SB shared the headline findings from the ‘Attendance – Public First Report’ and asked if the headline findings resonated with the working group. Strikes so soon after covid has had an impact. Since covid parents no longer see schools as a safe place. Sickness has increased massively since covid, parents are more cautious about sending their children to school when they are unwell.

Intersectional working was noted as an example where other partners could be linked into this work.

It was asked if there was a target that would make a difference to attendance. There are green shoots and good practice can be shared. Prosecution for non-attendance did stop for a while but has now started back up with the local authority.

Colleagues noted that it feels like non-attendance has become more socially acceptable since covid. Term time holidays were noted as an issue and is becoming the norm for parents who just add the cost of the fine onto the cost of the holiday. Currently the local authority fine one parent for term time holiday and it may make more of a difference if both parents were fined. This is about children who aren’t attaining rather than just the data.

SB commented it felt like a civic approach to attendance and this was still felt to be the case by the working group. This will now be taken forward as part of the consultation as a suggested first priority and example of a priority that can appropriately be tackled at a city level with input from many partners.

It was asked if wider stakeholders would be involved in the next steps such as health. SB suggested that a range of colleagues should be involved in the working group for this priority.

**Partnership Structure** - the next stage of the discussion about the potential structure of the new partnership, looking ahead to developing a proposal for consultation in the new year.

In terms of the piece of work SB would like to bring something back to the working group ahead of the next meeting so that the outcome of the meeting can be the consultation document to share with the wider sector.

SB shared elements of the consultation which have had general agreement previously:

- Partnership led by an independent chair
- Membership designed to connect to and reflect the existing infrastructure
- Small board (8-10) – from the infrastructure supplemented by co-options by chair to provide balance
- Priorities addressed through task & finish groups to maximise the expertise involved
- Receive annual needs analysis and ‘commission’ short inputs on identified trails
- Open and innovative consultative approach to analysis to ensure transparency and credibility
- The priorities are determined by which are the biggest issues where civic activity can bring about change/impact

AJ added the local authority does not have significant funding available but recognises the need to make this work using the existing resources in the system such as admin support which is being provided by Learn Sheffield. There is a need to get something up and running to allow the different partnerships / schools to decide if it needs resourcing.

SB suggested that the consultation could propose that this work will be done for one year and reviewed.

It was noted there is an attendance team at the local authority who can draw on known data.

SB shared a list of items where there is not yet agreement or which haven't yet been covered sufficiently:

- Clear rationale for the purpose of the partnership – designed to be consciously different to existing – needs setting out
- Approaches to analysis and consultation need more detail
- Consider the timeline of the cycle – Needs Analysis lands most naturally in late autumn/early spring
- Set out how the members will be identified and what the objectives are when co-opting further members to ensure balance
- Resources for the partnership structure (and the priorities) needs to be outlined and sourced
- Approach to oversight and monitoring of impact needs to be clear
- More detail is required to set out how/why the partnership will promote shared values, collaboration, support and challenge for all stakeholders, etc.

Colleagues discussed whether the sector groups are the right groups to access special, secondary and primary partnership representatives. They noted that it should not feel like it is a local authority group and it is important to try to capture MAT CEOs in this group. Colleagues also raised how this work applies to post-16 and where the FE sector sit. DT shared that attendance is a core focus for the college and working in partnership with schools and other partners on a strategic approach is welcomed. The college engages with many adults through its community and education offer, many of whom will be parents. There is an

opportunity to use this as part of how we promote the value of attendance to attainment of the young people in their communities.

It was accepted that the partnership would not be able to have representation from every stakeholder but enough representation to make decision and influence the direction.

SB asked the group if the timeline sounded acceptable and colleagues were comfortable with a consultation being shared in the new year. SB will share a draft consultation ahead of the next meeting so that colleagues can consider and feedback at the meeting in December.

**Date and time of next meeting**

Friday 15 December 2023, 10.00-12.00pm

Learn Sheffield Albion House