

Children and Education Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes

Monday 27 July 2020

NOTE: This meeting was held remotely

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Sharon Holder (Chair), Lucy Richardson, Alexandra Sanderson, Asif Siddique and Mark Loveday

Co-opted members: Eleanor Allen (London Diocesan Board for Schools), Nandini Ganesh (Parentsactive Representative), Matt Jenkins (Teacher Representative) and Nadia Taylor (Parent Governor Representative)

Other Councillors: Councillor Larry Culhane (Cabinet Member for Children and Education)

Officers:

Jacqui McShannon (Director of Children's Services)
Mandy Lawson (Assistant Director SEN and Disabilities)
Bev Sharpe (Assistant Director of Family Services)
Dr Nicola Lang (Director of Public Health)
Phil Tomsett (Head of Early Years)
Keith Tysoe (Principal Advisor SEND and Inclusion)
Will Parsons (Strategic Lead)
Lesley Bell (Strategic Lead)
Tony Burton (Head of Finance, Children's Services)
Jo Pymont (Assistant director, performance and improvement)
David Abbott (Head of Governance)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2. ROLL CALL AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair carried out a roll call of committee members to confirm their attendance. There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A resident submitted a set of questions related to the Youth Council section (Item 4) of the minutes of the meeting held in January 2020. As they were unable to attend the meeting a written response was provided. The responses are copied below.

Q. Do the Youth Council engage with youth clubs?

A. Youth Council regularly engage with and host meetings at clubs prior to COVID. They host ballots for UK Youth Parliament and Youth Mayor elections and are actively involved in our events including Take Over Challenge and Youth Achievement Awards. We work alongside Young Hammersmith and their members (youth providers) on various projects and are planning a Youth Voice Network meeting with members in September.

Q. In terms of social isolation with youths and concern with knife crime - is there an action for follow up with Youth Justice in H&F?

A. An action plan has been produced to respond to young people's suggestions following workshops on knife crime and street safety at Take Over Challenge 2019 and shared with relevant professionals and teams. Our Member of Youth Parliament and London Youth Assembly Members are also working on regional and national campaigns on knife crime. The response to knife crime is obviously across various departments and teams. The focus for the Youth Council is to capture and share youth voice.

Q. Has there been an improvement with recycling in schools?

A. Recycling in schools is a focus of their manifesto. Ozan and Scarlett, our current MYP and Youth Mayor have worked alongside the borough's Recycling Team, to develop a list of the top 10 single use plastics items used by young people and alternatives and sharing of best practice for schools. This will be distributed to schools before the start of the next Academic year. The priority for them during COVID has been the youth focused communication and videos.

Q. Did the concern about young people finding teachers & other professionals intimidating get addressed?

A. Youth Council have covered this in their videos on the impact of COVID on young people, which have been shared with Head Teachers. Think this point was particularly in relation to the teaching of PHSE. Youth Council are also working on some core modules (they are referring to this as the 'curriculum for life') and it will include suggestions for teachers and the plan is planned is to share with all schools in September. We also have a framework for involving young people in interviews which can be re-shared with schools.

Q. Did the H&F alumni portal materialise?

A. Answer to be circulated.

5. CHILDREN'S SERVICES RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Jacqui McShannon, Director of Children's Services, introduced the report which provided an overview of the key changes made to the Children's Services operating model in response to Covid-19 and related challenges in the community.

Jacqui McShannon took a moment to say how proud she was of Children's Services officers who showed initiative, courage and determination – and a real child centred approach – when responding to the pandemic and its impacts on children and families in the borough. The Council had been committed to co-production during the pandemic response and had worked closely with the Youth Council, care leavers, parents and carers. She highlighted the collaboration that had taken place across the whole Children's economy, noting that H&F's partnerships (including schools, safeguarding, the police, and commissioned services) had not just stood up but came together in dynamic and committed ways.

Jacqui McShannon explained that Children's Services had provided a coordinating response, mandated by central Government but not fully resourced. The department had stepped up – redeploying staff, requesting and receiving additional resources from the Council to be deployed in the best interests of serving children and young people in the borough.

She noted that the impact for children and young people was not over as most children were not yet back in school. Officers were continuing remote visits and were anticipating new challenges and a surge in demand in the Autumn.

Children's Social Care and Family Services

Bev Sharpe, Assistant Director of Family Services, gave a presentation on the response from children's social care and family services.

Councillor Mark Loveday asked what action had been taken in relation to care placements outside of the borough. What happened if carers were ill or self-isolating? Bev Sharpe said all carers had backup care arrangements in place. There was only one case where a carer fell ill and a child had to be moved to another carer temporarily.

Councillor Loveday noted that looked after children typically had a lower than arrange attendance rate at schools and asked what had been done to improve engagement during lockdown. Bev Sharpe said each child was allocated a virtual schoolteacher who links their educational needs with the school's provision. The virtual schoolteacher stays in regular contact and sets educational challenges each week. All looked after children had access to online learning.

Councillor Loveday asked if there was any feedback on how successful the virtual school had been. Bev Sharpe said young people were engaging well with the virtual school.

Matt Jenkins, noting the risk of a second wave of the pandemic, asked what preparations the Council could make to improve access to technology. Bev Sharpe said the Council completed a roll-out of 770 laptops by mid-July.

Councillor Lucy Richardson noted that a new restructure of mental health services had just been launched by Hammersmith & Fulham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). She asked if young people had been engaged in the process. Bev Sharpe said Children's Services officers were meeting regularly with the CCG to look at service development and working together in different way. The Council was committed to co-production and wanted young people involved in shaping the services they used. Officers were also looking at internal mental health services and wanted young people involved in that too.

Councillor Richardson asked what programmes were in place for vulnerable teens, especially those with special needs, who were suffering from a lack of exercise and socialisation since the lockdown.

Councillor Richardson noted that the peer support for transition age students sounded good (video CV writing etc.) – and asked how many people had received the service and if there were plans to roll it out more widely.

Officers agreed to provide more detailed answers outside of the meeting.

ACTION: Jacqui McShannon / Bev Sharpe

Nadia Taylor asked how many face-to-face visits had taken place with children in need – and how that compared to normal service. Bev Sharpe said it was around 20 percent initially, with child protection cases being prioritised. That was for around six weeks at the start of lockdown, but the service quickly got back to seeing 100 percent of cases.

Education

Keith Tysoe, Principal Advisor SEND and Inclusion, and Phil Tomsett, Head of Early Years, gave a presentation on the education service.

Councillor Asif Siddique asked what SEND support had been provided to families during lockdown and if there had been a rise in domestic violence. Nandini Ganesh noted that Parentsactive had recently conducted a survey of parents and they were generally happy with the Council's efforts. There were some concerns though like the wide range of support from schools. Some parents also really struggled with the technology for remote learning. Jacqui McShannon noted that she chaired the Violence Against Women and Girls group, which had continued to meet during lockdown, and there hadn't been a local increase in domestic violence incidents.

Councillor Mark Loveday asked if there were up-to-date figures on school attendance. Officers explained that the data was incomplete as not all schools had made returns. Low attendance had been reported across London. The Committee asked for updated attendance figures to be circulated.

ACTION: Jan Parnell

Councillor Loveday asked if withdrawal of free travel for under-18s had made an impact on attendance. Officers said it probably wasn't a significant factor. Primary schools were generally within walking distance of pupil's homes.

Councillor Loveday asked what lessons could be drawn out on school attendance in this time of crisis. Officers said a key lesson was to ensure parents didn't feel stigmatised, and travel could become an issue in the Autumn. Dr Nicola Lang, Director of Public Health, added that five of H&F's primaries were taking part in a national Covid-19 study and they were commended on their organisation and engagement. There was a step change in attendance after the first batch of testing. Letters went out to parents explaining the evidence about infection and spreading risk in children. Schools also received 'Staying Safe in School' guidance and protective equipment for teachers. Officers had also reached and worked with groups in the community that had specific concerns about travel arrangements etc.

Nandini Ganesh said parents were anxious and there were concerns about the regularity of testing. Dr Lang said each school had done extensive risk assessments and created outbreak plans and put social distancing and hygiene measures in place.

Councillor Asif Siddique asked how many laptops had been allocated for remote learning. Officers said 1000 pupils had been identified from vulnerable groups and around 700 had been allocated.

Eleanor Allen asked for more information on the 16 plus cohort who should have done GCSEs and be going on to sixth form. Officers agreed to take this away and provide an answer by email.

ACTION: Jan Parnell

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Mandy Lawson, Assistant Director SEN and Disabilities, gave a presentation on the SEND service.

Nandini Ganesh noted that Parentsactive, in partnership with the Council, ran remote sessions via Zoom with around 130 parents. She felt it was a good, dynamic piece of work. Lots of parents were engaged and had a chance to contribute and co-produce support services.

Councillor Mark Loveday asked about the outbreak at the Haven and where the children and young people were from. Mandy Lawson said there were 3 from H&F and 2 from RBKC.

Councillor Loveday asked how they became ill. Mandy Lawson said the infections had happened in the early days of the virus where there were high levels of infection in the community – and before staff were wearing PPE even if they had no symptoms.

Nandini Ganesh raised the concerns of parents about the temporary changes to EHCP legislation during the pandemic. Mandy Lawson explained that the temporary

changes were due to expire in September and the Government had no intention of renewing them.

Commissioning

Lesley Bell and Will Parsons, Strategic Leads, gave a presentation on the Children's Services Commissioning Service.

Family Support

Lesley Bell (Strategic Lead) gave a presentation on the Family Support Service.

Councillor Mark Loveday asked what the financial impact had been for the department and schools. Jacqui McShannon said the financial impact for the department had been relatively limited so far. But pent-up demand emerging in the Autumn could change this – just a few complex cases would have a significant impact on the budget. Schools had incurred additional costs from adaptations, deep cleaning etc. There was a scheme from Government to reclaim costs but not lost income. The Chair asked for an update on the final financial impact by the next meeting.

ACTION: Tony Burton

Matt Jenkins asked what measures had been taken to protect vulnerable members of staff. Jacqui McShannon said schools have produced risk assessments and plans for social distancing and outbreak management etc. Officers had met with headteachers and unions to help them understand their responsibilities and provide support.

The Chair summarised the discussion and noted the following actions:

1. An item on the schools Covid-19 study (sKIDs) for the next meeting
2. Information on the 16 plus cohort
3. Information on digital engagement during lockdown
4. An update on mental health support
5. Figures on school attendance during lockdown to be circulated
6. An update on the financial impact on each service

To close the item, the Chair put on record her thanks to all officers for the resilience and professionalism shown throughout the pandemic response. She also thanked all Children and Education staff who had adapted their roles to continue to support the borough's children, young people, and families. She also thanked all those at the Haven who remained at work after the coronavirus outbreak when the personal consequences for them were not clear. Lastly, she said the Committee looked forward to many of the challenges raised at the meeting being resolved in the coming year.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as 22 September 2020.

Meeting started: 6.30 pm
Meeting ended: 8.41 pm

Chair

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