

Children and Education Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes

Monday 18 January 2016

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Caroline Needham (Chair), Alan De'Ath, Caroline Ffiske (Vice-Chair), and Donald Johnson

Co-opted members: Eleanor Allen (London Diocesan Board for Schools), Dennis Charman (Teacher Representative), Nandini Ganesh (Parentsactive Representative), Philippa O'Driscoll (Westminster Diocesan Education Service Representative) and Nadia Taylor (Parent Governor Representative)

Other Councillors: Councillors Sue Macmillan (Cabinet Member for Children and Education), Sue Fennimore (Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion), and Max Schmid (Cabinet Member for Finance)

Officers: Hitesh Jolapara, Andrew Lord, Dave McNamara, Steve Miley, Glen Peache, Andrew Christie, Glen McLean, and David Abbott

1. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Elaine Chumnerly.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no public questions.

5. YOUTH TAKE OVER DAY - EVALUATION REPORT

Youth Council members gave a presentation about Youth Take Over Day 2015 in Hammersmith and Fulham. Youth Take Over Day was a national campaign that started in 2007. Last year's event was the biggest in the borough's history with 121 young people involved and a number of organisations and businesses taking part. The Youth Council reported that feedback from professionals was incredibly positive and everyone involved was keen to take part again this year.

The Youth Council members said the experience was positive and gave them an insight into how the Council helps and supports children. One of the young people presenting said it had given her the confidence to join the Youth Council.

Members asked if there were any improvements that young people wanted to see at the next event. Members of the Youth Council responded that they would like more sessions and activities led by young people.

Members asked how young people chose their activities for Youth Take Over Day. Brenda Whinnett responded that a booklet of preferences was distributed to show what was available and allow people to write about why they wanted to do their top choices. Officers had tried to give every participant one of their top five choices, but if that wasn't possible they were contacted and skills-matched to relevant activities.

Members asked how young people found out about Youth Take Over Day. The Youth Council said it was promoted in their schools through teachers and after school clubs. The Youth Council members suggested they could reach a wider group of young people by doing promotional assemblies. Brenda Whinnett noted that they were also thinking about producing a promotional video.

Members asked if schools were all supportive of the project. Brenda Whinnett responded that a very few schools still did not engage well with Youth Voice but good relationships had been developed with the majority of schools in the borough. She noted that it was a challenge to maintain relationships and contacts within schools due to high staff turnover.

Andrew Christie asked if services within the Council had engaged well with the event. Brenda Whinnett noted that there had been a good level of engagement with around 35 unique activities made available across a diverse range of services and she hoped for even more this year. Andrew Christie requested that this was reported back to the management board to show the positive outcomes of the event and ensure it continued.

Members asked if young people with special educational needs were able to take part. Brenda Whinnett responded that they had worked closely with Action on Disability and had tried to offer as many full accessible activities as possible. In the future they wanted all activities to be open to anyone. All Youth Voice projects were open to people with special educational needs up to the age of 25. Youth Voice would be working more closely with Parentsactive to publicise upcoming events.

Andrew Christie thanked Brenda Whinnett for making 2015's Youth Take Over Day the borough's biggest and best yet.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted and commented on the contents of the report.

6. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Ofsted Inspection

Andrew Christie reported that Ofsted had begun inspecting the social care services. The process would last four weeks; week one was focused on the 'front door' of the social care services (including CSE and missing children); in week two the inspectors left to allow managers to produce detailed audits of cases and respond to the inspector's questions; weeks three and four saw the return of the inspectors who would focus on the later stages of care (care plans etc.). A full report would be published at the end of the process.

Members asked if the Ofsted inspection drew resources away from frontline services. Andrew Christie responded that the process was very demanding on resources from both the social work and management teams. During the inspection senior officer from services that were not part of the process had been supporting work across departments.

Members asked for more information about the scale of the Ofsted inspection and what form the feedback took. Andrew Christie responded that Ofsted had brought in 28 inspectors across the three boroughs, equating to roughly one inspector for each head of service in the Family Services directorate. Feedback took different forms; Steve Miley met with the lead inspector for a daily debrief; during the day managers received feedback from inspectors; inspectors produced lines of inquiry to test various hypotheses; and at the end of the process the Council receives a grading, in much the same way a school does, ranging from 'inadequate' to 'outstanding'.

Members asked when the last time the Council had been inspected and the grading. Andrew Christie responded that since the last inspection in 2011 the inspection framework had changed to the 'Single Inspection Framework. At the time of the last inspection the Council received a judgement of 'good with outstanding features'.

Retirement of the Executive Director for Children's Services

Members asked if there was a candidate in mind for the position of Executive Director of Children's Services following Andrew Christie's retirement. Andrew

Christie responded that head hunters had been recruited to support the recruitment process and ensure that a suitable candidates were identified. All three boroughs would be involved in the appointment process.

Members requested that Andrew Christies replacement be introduced to Parentsactive representatives to ensure a continuation of the good working relationship between them and the Council. Officers noted that Parentsactive representatives would be a part of the stakeholder interview panel.

The Bridge Academy and Free School

Members asked for clarity over the funding model for the Bridge Academy and free school. Dave McNamara responded that funding to expand to accommodate a 16-19 offer was linked to the redevelopment of the whole site. The Council would be making a decision in March 2016 about contributing funding to ensure the Bridge Academy provided the best possible service to children.

Travel Care and Support Service

Nandini Ganesh noted that Parentsactive had been asked to comment on draft criteria for the Travel Care and Support Service and raised concerns that it was more stringent than past guidance. Officers responded that the intention was to make the criteria clearer and more transparent; there was no intention to reduce the entitlement.

The Chair asked if the fact that the Ofsted inspection was being carried out simultaneously across the three boroughs was a limiting factor at the grading stage. Officers responded that because a majority of casework was borough based it would still be possible for the three boroughs to have separate judgements made on quality. Officers had asked for a joint inspection to avoid shared teams having to go through the process multiple times.

7. CABINET MEMBER'S UPDATE

Councillor Sue Macmillan, Cabinet Member for Children and Education, provided an overview of recent developments of relevance to the Committee. Since the previous meeting Councillor Macmillan had:

- Visited Cambridge School and Avonmore Primary School.
- Attended a Looked after Children review meeting.
- Attended an awards event at Chelsea F.C. organised by the Virtual School team to celebrate the academic achievements of Children in Care.
- Attended the H&F Schools Christmas Concert put on by the Tri-borough Music Hub.
- Visited Melcombe Children's Centre prior to Christmas as part of the flu-jab programme for children aged four and under.

8. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS ANNUAL REPORT

Glen Peache presented the report and highlighted the fact that GCSE performance for 2014/15 had improved significantly, representing the highest overall academic achievement to date. He noted that the care leavers service had been reorganised to ensure there were more qualified social workers to provide a greater consistency of relationships to young people. It was also noted that their work was enhanced by the use of the Focus on Practice clinical team.

The service had also begun some pioneering work called Action for Change that provided support to parents who had had children removed from their care. The support was designed to help parents think about the reasons for their children being removed and help to prevent it from happening in the future. Since its inception the programme had produced very positive outcomes for parents in the borough. The Chair asked for a report to come to committee on the Action for Change programme.

ACTION: Steve Miley / Glen Peache

Looking forward the service would be focusing on late entrants into care, as over the past year the numbers had increased by 100 percent.

Members asked why the numbers of children in H&F who had had their teeth checked by a dentist was lower than the national average. Glen Peache responded that the dip may be due to the rise in numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers who were generally more reluctant to attend dentist appointments. Members noted that having healthy teeth was fundamental to later life health outcomes.

Members asked if there was a process to ascertain the age of unaccompanied asylum seekers. Officers responded that if the age of a child was disputed there would be an in depth assessment.

Members asked if the increase in unaccompanied asylum seekers was indicative of a future trend. Glen Peache responded that the recent change in numbers was likely to be due to a pan-London protocol as to how unaccompanied asylum seekers were distributed between boroughs. There had been a challenge as to how proportionate that had been and it was expected that there would be more of an even distribution going forward. Officers noted that the protocol was for 16 year olds and above. Under 16s who could prove a local connection had to be supported by the relevant borough. The issue was a national one but it was likely that the numbers would stay at the recent relatively high level for some time. The challenges presented by this were variable according to individual's legal status. Where they were in the asylum process directly linked to the opportunities afforded to them.

Members asked for more information on the reduction in missing children numbers. Steve Miley responded that better practices had been put in place and the service had particularly tightened up tracking of young people at risk

of CSE. The Family Assist team was also being used to influence young people to make better choices and reduce their risk of harm.

Members asked if future funding issues could affect that work. Officers responded that they were not planning on making any changes in those areas.

Members asked what guidance was given to young people who did not achieve good academic results. Officers responded that they were directed towards apprenticeship programmes and other educational training programmes. Andrew Christie noted that later entrants tended to have a variety of needs and sometimes it took them longer to achieve the results they were capable of.

Members asked for more information behind the decrease in adoption numbers. Officers responded that a recent judgement (referred to as the Re B-S Judgement) had stated that adoption should be a last resort and had cooled the number of adoptions nationally. The Government was carrying out analysis on the judgement and the subsequent impact on the adoption landscape.

Members asked if there was feedback available from children in care on their level of satisfaction with the services, including softer measures around their mental wellbeing. Steve Miley responded that feedback was received through statutory reviews and independent checks every six months. Officer had also begun a radical overhaul of the Corporate Parenting Board; taking a thematic approach to meetings informed by consultations with looked after children and care leavers. The Children in Care Council led on these consultations and this had led to information about a wealth of issues that would be responded to via development groups. Glen Peache noted that particular concerns were raised on the quality of leaving care accommodation and this was being looked into.

Eleanor Allen raised a concern from a young person who said they had been left without a social worker at a critical stage (moving to secondary school) following staffing changes. Steve Miley responded that every young person should have a social worker and arrangements should be in place to cover any absences. Steve Miley said he would follow up this issue outside of the meeting.

ACTION: Steve Miley

The Chair noted that there had been feedback about the number of social workers that young people have over their time in care and the disruption it caused. This was also raised as an issue for schools with teachers having to have the same conversations with multiple social workers. The Chair requested that this information be provided in next year's report.

ACTION: Glen Peache

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted and commented on the report.

9. CHILDREN'S SERVICES BUDGET PROPOSALS

Hitesh Jolapara presented the corporate budget position. He outlined the national funding situation, showing the successive reductions in funding from Central Government. He noted that the Government had given local authorities the option of adding an adult social care precept to Council Tax, but in H&F this would only cover six percent of the adult social care budget. It had been proposed that councils would be retaining business rates by end of this parliament but it was likely that would come with additional burdens including housing benefit, capital projects, and public health funding. More information on the retention of business rates would be available this year and officers would keep the committee updated.

Dave McNamara addressed the committee and outlined the Children's Services section of the budget. Children's Services had experienced significant successive reductions in their budget from around £50m in 2011/12 to around £35m at present. Family Services was the largest budget area within the department at around £27m.

Due to the nature of the services provided Children's Services experienced demand led growth that was out of the Council's control (e.g. supporting children in care post-16). Officers noted that they were getting better at identifying pressures earlier and were proactively setting aside budget allocations to mitigate these pressures going forward.

Schools were also facing a number of funding challenges at the moment with changes to the national funding formula and pensions. The new schools meals services should reduce costs for schools and free up funding for other areas.

Key risks included the upcoming Ofsted inspection, potential delays in delivery a large savings programme, further growth pressures, and changes to legislation.

Members asked when the detail would be known of how changes to the funding formula would affect H&F schools. Dave McNamara responded that details were not clear at present. The Campaign for Fairer Funding in Education (f40) had produced figures that showed a reduction of around £40m for schools in the borough.

Members asked for more detail on the savings programmes in social care. Steve Miley responded that there were three key areas of focus:

- Reducing the numbers of young people entering care through more targeted lower level support.
- Reducing the length of time people stayed in care by working more effectively with families to return children to them faster. The service would also improve recruitment of adopters and special guardians.
- Keeping placement costs down through the use of family based care and other options - costs ranged from £8,000 per year for a placement with a relative to £300,000 per year for a complex placement.

The Chair requested a report on the training and development of social workers.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted and commented on the report.

10. WORK PROGRAMME

Members requested the following items to be considered at a future meeting:

- Customer feedback in the care services.
- Members suggested an item on commercial revenue within Children's Services, particularly schools (buildings, sports facilities, and equipment).

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for 29 Feb 2016.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Co-opted Members from Academy Schools

The Chair requested agreement from the Committee to allow Academy School Governors to join the Committee as Co-opted Parent Governors. Members unanimously agreed the proposal.

RESOLVED

That the Committee agreed to allow Academy Parent Governors to sit on the Committee as co-opted members.

Meeting started: 19:00
Meeting ended: 21:45

Chair

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