

Children and Education Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes

Monday 21 November 2016

PRESENT

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

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

Other Councillors: Councillor Sue Fennimore (Acting Cabinet Member for Children and Education)

Officers: Clare Chamberlain, Rachael Wright-Turner, Jody Nason, John Francis, Mandy Lawson, Steve Miley, and David Abbott

1. MINUTES

Corrections

Nandini Ganesh noted some errors in Item 7 of the minutes. The following paragraph:

“Nandini Ganesh raised a specific concern regarding gaps in the provision of plans for 19-24 year olds. There was a lack of clarity as to whether provision would be made, to illustrate, if a student sought a level 2 plan, an EHCP was required. She continued, referring to the use of parent advocacy at panels and enquired when this would happen.

Should be replaced with:

“Nandini Ganesh noted that students in the middle years of college, e.g. in their second year or studying for a Level 2 course, were often not aware that they could apply for an EHC Plan. She then asked when parent advisors would start attending EHC panels.”

RESOLVED

With the corrections noted above, the minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2016 were approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Marcus Ginn and Philippa O'Driscoll.

Nandini Ganesh noted that she had to leave after the Travel Care and Support Service item.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no public questions.

5. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Clare Chamberlain, Executive Director of Children's Services, presented the report and took questions from the Committee.

GCSE Results

Councillor Caroline Ffiske noted that she knew some of the West London Free School results were incorrect and asked if they were provisional results. Clare Chamberlain responded that the data came directly from schools but not all of the results had been submitted yet. Once they were submitted they would be verified by the Department for Education (DfE) and final results would be published in January 2017.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly asked if there was a reason for the relatively low EBACs scores for Phoenix High School, Fulham College Boys' School, and Hurlingham Academy. Dennis Charman commented that the EBACs performance measure was not compulsory for schools yet – while many schools had already begun using it internally and had seen good results, others were further behind. Clare Chamberlain said Ian Heggs could provide a written explanation to the committee.

Ark Swift Redevelopment

Matt Jenkins, in reference to 3.3 of the report, asked if the redevelopment of the Ark Swift site was being funded by the Council. Rachael Wright-Turner responded that the redevelopment was being funded by Ark.

Unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugees

Councillor Alan De'Ath, with reference to 4.1 of the report, noted that three of the children were described as 'long term missing' and asked officers to clarify what that meant. Steve Miley responded that it meant they had gone 'underground' – they would be officially categorised as missing by the police and the local authority. If social services thought they were in immediate danger there would be a publicity campaign. Councillor De'Ath asked what percentage of those who go missing came back. Steve Miley said it was a low percentage – young people fearing deportation were unlikely to return to the authorities.

Administrative support to social workers

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly noted that the Munroe Review of Child Protection from 2011 made recommendations to help alleviate the administrative burden on social workers but it seemed that had been lost. Clare Chamberlain responded that Partners in Practice (later in the agenda) put a focus on removing bureaucratic barriers for social workers. Children's Services had also recently embarked on a project with FutureGov to look at improving the case management system to free up social worker time.

School Meals Contract Monitoring and Mobilisation Update

Rachael Wright Turner highlighted the school meals update following discussion at the previous meeting. She noted that the update set out data from the robust monitoring and engagement process for the contract. Jody Nason reported that following concerns raised at the previous meeting, officers had visited the schools mentioned and had resolved the issues.

Councillor Caroline Ffiske asked how parents choosing to send their children with pack lunches would affect pricing and ultimately, the viability of the contract. Rachael Wright-Turner responded that the contract cost was based on expected volumes. The price was set per meal and schools only paid for meals served. If fewer people chose to have the meals it would result in reduced profit for provider. She noted that officers were in daily contact with the provider and they were not seeing any significant change in expected volumes.

Nadia Taylor commented that she still had the same concerns raised at the previous meeting (portion size, overall quality etc.). Councillor Sue Fennimore noted that she asked for the update report and the headteacher at the school in question didn't raise any concerns. She asked to meet with Rachael Wright-Turner and the headteacher to discuss.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly suggested that officers carried out a survey of parents to find out if there were any outstanding issues. Officers said they would explore this.

Integrated Family Support Service

Nandini Ganesh asked if the Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) tied in to the Youth Partnership Board. Rachael Wright-Turner said they were different initiatives – the Youth Partnership was a structure that allowed providers to shape bids for youth services contracts. However, provision from

the youth sector would be connected with IFSS. She assured the committee that the Board were fully aware of IFSS developments and last month they were involved in workshops and discussions.

National Fair Funding Formula (Schools Funding)

Matt Jenkins noted the update on the fair funding formula, which determined the level of funding schools received from the Government, and welcomed the Council's proactive approach to lobbying for a better deal for its schools. He informed the committee that the NUT and ATL had produced an interactive website - www.schoolcuts.org.uk - that illustrated the impact of the funding reductions. He asked that the committee be circulated an update following the Autumn Statement and discuss further at the following meeting.

6. CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

The Chair noted that Councillor Sue Fennimore had been assuming the duties of the Cabinet Member for Children and Education while Councillor Sue Macmillan was on maternity leave, and congratulated Councillor Macmillan on the birth of her son.

Councillor Sue Fennimore gave the following updates:

- She attended the Shared Services Lead Members meeting where SEN services, the youth offending service, and the Integrated Family Support Service were discussed.
- She visited Fulham Cross Girls' School and met the Executive Headteacher – she noted the wonderful work going on at the school.
- She attended a market engagement day for the new Travel Care and Support contract.
- She attended an event for OnSide Youth Zones – a dynamic new approach for youth services.
- And finally she attended a planning meeting for running a pilot of the 'Show Racism the Red Card' campaign in local schools.

Eleanor Allen also offered her congratulations to Councillor Macmillan and asked whether schools had been informed of the interim Cabinet Member arrangements. Councillor Fennimore noted that a number of schools had been in contact with her already but said she would follow up after the meeting.

7. TRAVEL CARE AND SUPPORT SERVICE

Jody Nason presented the report that gave an overview of the Travel Care and Support Service project including the service specification and the process through which it was developed. Officers had looked at the lessons learned from the previous procurement and at what went well with the more recent Jack Tizard contract. Through the development process, including detailed consultations, engagement, and co-development the following areas were identified:

- Passenger & Travel Care - caring for, and understanding the travel and mobility needs of children.
- Communication & Relationships – better information sharing between providers, young people, parents, carers, schools and after school provision.
- Quality – a person centred service with the unique needs of each child or young person well known and understood by providers and staff.
- Transport & Safety - children and young people should be collected and returned on time at agreed points and never left unsupervised.
- Staffing & Recruitment - staff should be well trained to support and care children and young people's individual and often complex needs.
- Timing & Logistics – children's comfort should be paramount when route planning.

Rachael Wright-Turner added that they had just held a market engagement day, which was an opportunity to present the Council's vision for the service to potential providers and get a sense of the response from them. 45 transport provider staff attended, including representatives from six social enterprises, and feedback on the new specification was very positive. Providers had an additional four weeks prior to the tender going live to speak with officers and learn more about the Council's requirements for the service.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly commended officers and the Cabinet Members for their work on the new service. She highlighted the importance of having parents and school representatives involved in co-developing the specification and the clear community benefits it offered.

The Chair noted that a working group had been set up two years ago when the issues with the previous service had been uncovered and she was pleased to see how far it had progressed. It was also affirming to know there were providers that shared the Council's vision for a better kind of transport service.

Nandini Ganesh commented that the Council did a brilliant job with the development of the specification - she was very involved as a representative of Parentsactive and she knew of many other parents who were also involved, either through the working group or those who were called for their views. She asked if the existing providers came to the market engagement day. Rachael Wright-Turner said they did, though there was a marked difference between the way the Council saw the new transport service and the way the traditional passenger transport sector operated. Problems in the past had stemmed from providers winning bids with very low cost contracts that fell-down on quality. The new contract specification was weighted to favour quality over price, ensuring that the successful provider would be guaranteed to deliver a high quality service.

Vic Daniels asked what level of due diligence was carried out on providers. Jody Nason responded that they would all go through a very thorough process. Providers had to pass a financial evaluation and risk assessment, prove they had the right quality of staff and training, and show they had robust safeguarding processes. Then they progressed to the quality assessment

where officers would assess whether they understood travel care and they would set out their service arrangements. That would be scored by commissioners and school representatives – then the final evaluation judged them on price, competitiveness, and took into account references from their previous contracts.

RESOLVED

The Committee reviewed and commented on the report.

8. PARTNERS IN PRACTICE

Clare Chamberlain presented the report that gave an update on Focus on Practice, a programme within Family Services funded by the Department for Education Innovation in Social Care programme, and the plans for the service's work as Partners in Practice with the DfE over the next four years.

The core objective of Focus on Practice was for social workers and other practitioners to use their professional expertise to help create positive change for families and better outcomes for children and young people. To that end the three councils were developing a Centre for Social Work, similar to a hospital trust teaching authority where staff from other authorities would come for placements. The DfE had also given licence for the Focus on Practice partners to think about the bureaucratic and regulatory barriers that could be loosened or removed to increase the time social workers had to spend working with families directly.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly asked what the feedback from social workers had been. Steve Miley responded that he was delighted with the enthusiasm that social workers have shown towards the programme. They particularly like that they get significant training that is practice based. They also get access to clinical therapists to augment their work. Ultimately these programmes freed-up social workers to spend more time with families and help people.

The Chair noted that, from speaking to social workers at Adoption and Fostering panels, the additional training and resources had given staff confidence in preparing for Ofsted inspections and generally improved staff morale. She asked if staff turnover had reduced because of the initiatives. Steve Miley responded that a number of staff members had stayed to complete the training, and even joined because of the training offer.

Vic Daniels asked how officers knew how much of social workers time was spent working with families as compared to the time spent on paperwork. Clare Chamberlain said they had done time logging exercises in the past and there were a number of studies that all gave a similar ratio. She said it would be useful to carry out similar exercises in future to see if the programmes had the desired impact.

Steve Miley commented that there were two specific bids – one was to reduce the number of children going into care by 20 percent, and the second was to reduce the re-referral rate. Those were the key measures for success and to

achieve them Family Services had to engender permanent change in families. Councillor Elaine Chumney asked if the Council had the right services in place to make sure that happened. Steve Miley said they had made progress by putting domestic violence specialists in social work teams. Feedback from social workers was that support for victimised women was far greater than support for men to change their behaviour. Unless male perpetrators changed their behaviour there was a significant danger of re-offending.

Councillor Alan De'Ath asked if, with staff from other authorities coming to the Centre for Social Work to train, there were commercial revenue opportunities. Clare Chamberlain responded that in year one the programme would be funded entirely by the DfE and in years two and three the goal is for the centre to be self-financing, but beyond that there may be revenue generating opportunities.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the report.

9. CHILD PROTECTION ANNUAL REPORT

The committee agreed to take the Child Protection Annual Report together with the Local Safeguarding Children Board annual report.

RESOLVED

The Committee reviewed and commented on the report.

10. LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16

Steve Miley presented the Child Protection Annual Report. He noted the broader context - that child protection was the primary focus for Ofsted and that H&F had recently achieved a 'good' grade, putting it amongst the very best local authorities in the Country. However, there was always room to improve. Since the inspection, referrals had risen by around ten to twenty percent but all of the work was allocated and statutory timescales were still being met. Family support and child protection services were stretched though and officers were looking to improve that through Focus on Practice and Family Assist.

Jean Daintith, Chair of Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), introduced the Local Safeguarding Children Board annual report. She noted that the LSCB was a multi-disciplinary group involved professionals from health, police, social care, community safety, housing, probation, prisons etc. that met quarterly and held special meetings for serious case reviews if a child was seriously harmed or died. The Board was looking at better ways of working – having less time in meetings and thinking more about making the work relevant to both the public and professionals.

Councillor Alan De'Ath asked if the increase in the number child protection plans was a national trend. Steve Miley said the cohort was very small so

numbers fluctuated but officers were investigating and could report back once analysis was complete.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly asked if officers considered the cumulative impact of agencies working with families – if a number of different professionals were interacting with families it could become overwhelming. Steve Miley agreed there was a danger, particularly when dealing with siblings. Family Assist involved only one person from that team and they developed close links with the family. Family Services tried to think which person was the most likely to create change.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly, noting the recommendation from Ofsted about partnership attendance, asked if there was anything the committee, or the Council, could do to improve attendance. Jean Daintith responded that attendance was generally good, and noted that often what happened outside of meeting was just as important. Meaningful engagement and good communication was key.

Councillor Caroline Ffiske asked for an update on the Troubled Families initiative. Clare Chamberlain responded that it was ongoing, the work was fully integrated into the Early Help service.

Vic Daniels asked if the increase in referrals was good news, in that problems were being better identified, or bad in that there was generally greater need. Steve Miley said it wasn't clear. The LSCB's function was to make sure other agencies were thinking about these issues so the increase could be reflective of that good work to raise awareness. On the other hand, it could also be indicative of increases in deprivation, mental ill health, and other things that negatively affected a child's environment. It was likely to be a mixture of both.

Dennis Charman, in reference to page 47 of the report, noted that there had been a large reduction in the turnover rate. In previous years the turnover rate had been comparable to schools but the improvement was significant – he suggested that perhaps there were lessons that the Education department could learn from Family Services. Steve Miley agreed that the turnover figure was good but noted that recruitment in general remained hard – and it was particularly difficult to recruit experienced social workers.

Councillor Alan De'Ath asked if there was anything the Council could do to retain social workers – helping with travel costs, housing etc. Steve Miley said it had been raised before - travel costs did not seem to be a significant driver but Councillor Sue Fennimore had asked officers to look at allocating some key worker housing. Cost of living was undoubtedly an issue, as staff got older and started families they tended to move to where they could afford to buy houses. Claire Chamberlain added that she was always surprised by the distance people would travel to work in London. She felt manageable caseloads and good managers were the key to retaining staff.

The Chair noted that she had asked the child protection report to look specifically at alcohol abuse and the impact on families. She commented that in her ward some pubs were organising child and toddler groups – she asked

if that was a wider trend and if it was an issue for safeguarding. Jean Daintith said she would follow up outside the meeting and speak to the Licensing team.

The Chair thanked everyone in child protection across the borough who worked every day to keep children safe.

RESOLVED

The Committee reviewed and commented on the report.

11. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee asked that the childcare sufficiency item on the work programme include case studies and a breakdown of childcare costs across the borough. They asked that this information be provided at the January meeting. Councillor Sue Fennimore noted that the Poverty and Worklessness Strategy included recommendations related to childcare as a barrier to work and they could be included in the report.

The Chair asked for a regular update of national items that had a local impact, to be included within the Executive Directors report.

The Committee also requested an update on upcoming changes school funding.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was schedule for 30 January 2017.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.20 pm

Chair

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