

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham



Children and Education Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes

Monday 30 January 2017

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Caroline Needham (Chair), Alan De'Ath, Elaine Chumnerly, and Marcus Ginn

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

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

Officers: Clare Chamberlain (Executive Director of Children's Services), Steve Miley (Director for Family Services), Ian Heggs (Director for Education), Dave McNamara (Director for Finance and Resources), Hitesh Jolapara (Strategic Finance Director), Brenda Whinnett (Youth Voice Coordinator), Thomas Gell (Customer Relationship Manager), Justine May (Head of Commissioning), Lauren Fernback (Assistant Virtual School Head), Helen Farrell (Assistant Director for Looked After Children and Care Leavers), and David Abbott (Scrutiny Manager)

1. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2016 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Caroline Ffiske.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no public questions.

5. YOUTH COUNCIL UPDATE

Members of the Youth Council gave a presentation to the committee highlighting the following achievements over the past year:

- H&F established its first Youth Cabinet.
- Aminata Koroma was elected as the first ever Youth Mayor of H&F and Joshua Yirkenyi was elected as Deputy Youth Mayor.
- Johnley Videna, who attends Burlington Danes Academy in White City, was named as the borough's Member of Youth Parliament on 22 March. He has taken part in many events including The House of Commons Debate, Days of Action, and The Annual Sitting.
- In 2016 H&F established a Youth Cabinet to lead and co-chair the Youth Council and to lead on the Youth Council Manifesto pledges – Child Poverty, Tackling Discrimination, and the Living Wage.
- Thousands of young people have given their views through the Make Your Mark campaign, Take Over Day, and a range of consultations.

Brenda Whinnett noted that the Youth Voice team had taken on an apprentice – a young person who had experienced children's services – and they hoped for more the in future. The Youth Voice team's areas for development were the upcoming elections for the next Youth Mayor and Member of the Youth Parliament, developing opportunities for young people with SEN, and developing more creative engagement events led by young people.

Councillor Alan De'Ath noted that LGBT history month was coming up and asked if the Youth Council could promote it (along with other similar events – black history month etc.). Brenda Whinnett said they were planning to do exactly that and had a planning session booked for the following evening.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly asked if the Make Your Mark survey touched on personal safety – particularly in relation to knife crime. Brenda Whinnett responded that the questions came from the National Youth Parliament but the Youth Council used the local results to inform their manifesto. While there wasn't a question on safety in the survey that topic did get addressed in other ways and would be discussed at the Youth Council meeting on 31 January 2017.

Nadia Taylor asked if the Youth Council worked with their counterparts in nearby boroughs. Brenda Whinnett said there was some informal knowledge sharing but their focus was on local issues.

Nandini Ganesh said she would like to see more Youth Voice events become accessible to young people with disabilities – particularly Youth Take Over Day.

Brenda Whinnett said she would be trying to make events more accessible in future and would like to work with Action on Disability and Parentsactive for advice and guidance. Nandini suggested she could also look at mentoring from other young people.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly asked if the Youth Council did any work around hate crime. Brenda Whinnett responded that they produced a video for the recent hate crime conference at the Council, as well as attending related events at City Hall. Hat crime was also addressed in the Make Your Mark survey. It would be an area for focus going forward.

The Chair noted that the Youth Mayor had already made a very positive start, establishing what will be a permanent feature of civic life in the borough. She offered her congratulations on behalf of the committee to everyone involved in the Youth Council.

6. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Clare Chamberlain presented the report that provided an overview of recent developments in the Children's Services department.

Councillor Alan De'Ath, referring to the Annual NEET Scorecard section of the report, asked for the total number of NEETs in the borough. Officers said the figure was less than 100 - an exact figure would be supplied outside the meeting.

Matt Jenkins asked what the Council could do to improve post-16 funding in the borough – noting that H&F was below the national average for engaging with NEETS. Ian Heggs responded that the cohort of young people who started a sixth form course then dropped out were very difficult to re-engage. The Council did work with local colleges to try and ensure young people were better informed when they decided to move on. Dave McNamara added that at the national level there were no protection for 16-19 funding which led to significant funding reductions by the DfE.

The Chair said she had discussed apprenticeships with the Youth Council and the feedback from young people was that parents felt they were lower status and discouraged young people taking them up. The Council needed to do more to raise their status and show the benefits of apprenticeships.

Ian Heggs noted that schools had their own funding to provide information and guidance – the Council encouraged schools to invite local colleges in to discuss options with their pupils. Developing good routes into apprenticeships was key – and that was happening now with the offer of pre-apprenticeships. There was also a successful Council-led programme of supported apprenticeships for young people with learning difficulties.

Dave McNamara noted that schools paid an apprenticeships levy and he was working with Mandy Lawson to develop an offer for children attending H&F schools with local employers.

Councillor Marcus Ginn asked if officers felt the Troubled Families Programme was working well in the borough. Clare Chamberlain responded that H&F was one of the best performing boroughs in London – the key differential being how well we did on employment.

Matt Jenkins, referring to the section of the report on safeguarding at football clubs, noted that press coverage had focused on national clubs and asked what safeguards were in place for smaller youth clubs. Steve Miley responded that the big clubs were taking this issue very seriously – they were undertaking an independent review of their practices and were in contact with the Council and the LSCB. The Council's concerns were with smaller clubs – officers couldn't meet with all of them and had to rely on the FA. Officers were however trying to raise the level of awareness of these issues across the entire sector.

Nadia Taylor asked what sort of guidance and advice the Council provided to the clubs. Steve Miley replied that Chelsea FC had asked for advice on a review of all of their services and the Council had provided terms of reference for that. They had contracted our former LADO who was very well qualified to give them multi-agency advice.

Vic Daniels noted that lower level clubs also took safeguarding very seriously and had for years.

Councillor Sue Fennimore added that after stories of abuse broke in the national press the Council contacted the local clubs to remind them of their statutory duty to report safeguarding issues. The Council were working very closely with them to ensure the proper safeguards were now in place.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly said there was also work to be done, through schools and our commissioned services, to raise awareness for parents who send their children to these clubs. She also suggested looking at best practices in other boroughs and asked to see a proposal for improvements going forward.

Nadia Taylor, referring to the Metropolitan Police Service - National child protection inspection section of the report, said she was concerned about the outcomes and asked how the Council was working with the police to address those issues.

Clare Chamberlain said one of the key concerns was that there was no single lead officer for safeguarding - that was now established. Other concerns were a lack of training for the average officer which is also being addressed. She noted that locally the Council had good links with the police, and they gave child protection a high priority, but we were looking to address any gaps highlighted by the inspection.

7. CABINET MEMBER'S UPDATE

Councillor Sue Fennimore gave the following updates:

- She visited Burlington Danes to discuss a more strategic approach to sports provision in the borough.
- She met with the Family Assist team to see their holistic approach to people on the edge of care.

- She attended the Youth Partnership launch event.
- The 'Show Racism the Red Card' programme was up and running in five local schools and the Council would like to support another round of funding to roll this out to more schools shortly.
- She highlighted the supported employment programme where nine young people with learning difficulties came to work at the Council in various departments. The programme had been very successful – with one young person being offered a full time job and an expansion with places being offered at local businesses.

Nandini Ganesh thanked Councillor Fennimore for the supported employment programme - and asked if the places on offer were just for H&F residents or if they would start taking people from other boroughs. Councillor Fennimore responded that The Council wanted residents to benefit first but if there were more places they would explore taking people from other boroughs.

A handout was circulated on the fair funding formula for schools. Councillor Fennimore noted she still had serious concerns about the impact the proposed reduction in funding would have on local schools. Dave McNamara noted that the current proposal meant a reduction of three percent in H&F. This was in addition to other pressures and would greatly impact schools – many of them already struggling to balance their budgets. Schools were worried that this would lead to a reduction in the number of teachers and affect standards.

Matt Jenkins noted that the NUT had produced a website – schoolcuts.org.uk – that illustrated the reductions in funding by showing the loss of teachers on a school by school basis.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly asked what the Council could do to support headteachers and governors. Dave McNamara said the issue had been discussed in detail at Schools Forum and there will be a briefing session for headteachers to go through the impact in their schools. The Council will also be writing to the Secretary of State for Education along with many local schools to ask for protections for London schools.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly suggested writing to chairs of governors so they can discuss the issue at their next meeting. Ian Heggs said the Annual Governors Conference was next Saturday (11 February) and funding would be discussed.

The Chair asked that local disability groups were briefed so they could comment on the consultation – with regards to the impact on the high needs block. She asked that an item on the consultation be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

8. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS REPORT 2015-16

Thomas Gell and Justine May presented the report that provided information about complaints made between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016. The report highlighted how the department performed against statutory timescales and the improvements that have been made.

Thomas Gell noted that 7.9 of the report showed the improvement that had been made since Justine May carried out a review and a new permanent team was put in place in October. Justine added that timeliness was the key improvement – against statutory timescales performance had been raised to 100 percent. Going forward the focus would be on improvement quality - linking with other teams to talk about the learning that came from the complaints.

Steve Miley noted that the number of complaints made up a very small proportion of the total number of cases dealt with each year – Family Services had around 1500 open cases and over 3000 engagements involving children but there were only 51 complaints in 2015-16.

Nadia Taylor asked what happened if complainants weren't satisfied with the outcome of Stage 3 of the complaints procedure. Thomas Gell said complainants had the option of going to the Local Government Ombudsman for review. Last year four cases were referred to the Ombudsman but only one was investigated and in that case the Ombudsman was satisfied with how it was handled.

Nandini Ganesh asked if advocacy services were available to complainants. Clare Chamberlain said all Looked After Children had access to advocacy.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted the report.

9. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS ANNUAL REPORT

Lauren Fernback and Helen Farrell presented the report that highlighted the responsibilities of the Looked After Children service, recent achievements, and developments for the future. Helen Farrell highlighted the steady decline in numbers of children and young people coming into care – attributed to the work of the Family Assist team.

Councillor Alan De'Ath asked what was behind the increase in the number of children with three or more placements increased. Helen Farrell responded that they were largely late entrants into care with complex needs. To address this the service had developed a LAC Assist model based on Family Assist which involved additional interventions and extra support for them and their foster carers.

Councillor De'Ath, noted the huge improvement in placement stability – 59.7% in 2014-15 up to 78.2% in 2015-16 – in table 9 of the report and said it was a welcome change.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly said early intervention was key – but there was still a taboo around asking for help. She asked how this could be addresses going forward. Steve Miley said the development of the Integrated Family Support Service – with an early help service that was slightly disconnected from higher level social work should help. The service was looking to place early help practitioners into schools so parents got to know them and didn't feel uncomfortable asking for some support.

Philippa O'Driscoll asked what age the Virtual School support started from. Lauren Fernback said the Virtual School started for some children at three years old - supporting foster carers with nursery places.

Councillor De'Ath asked if there was a dedicated careers advisor in the Virtual School. Lauren Fernback said there was a dedicated teacher as well as drop-in sessions and an EET worker. They also offered work experience placements through the local business partnership.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly asked for an update on the Action for Change programme – and a briefing on entries to care.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee noted the report.
2. Officers to provide briefing notes on Action for Change and entries into care.

10. CHILDREN'S SERVICES BUDGET REPORT 2017

Dave McNamara gave a presentation on the Children's Services budget for 2017-18. He highlighted the following points:

- Overall the department had a budget of £36m.
- This year there would be savings of just under £2m.
- The department had secured growth funding from corporate finance of £739k to address pressures in demand led services – including UASC, the Disabled Children's Resource Centre, and the Travel Care and Support Service.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly asked for more information on the foster carer case judgement and the impact on H&F. Dave McNamara responded that in R v London Borough of Tower Hamlets (2013) Mr Justice Males had taken the view that foster carers who were relatives of the children they cared for should be judged by the same criteria as any other foster carer and potentially receive the same payments.

Nandini Ganesh asked why there was a sharp increase in the budget for the Travel Care and Support Service. Dave McNamara referred Nandini to the appendix that showed the budget position over the next four years – there was only growth in one year and that was related to getting a better service in place.

Nandini Ganesh asked if the Disabled Children's Resource Centre would contribute to savings overall. Clare Chamberlain thought there would be savings in the longer term as parents wouldn't need as much overnight / respite care.

Councillor Marcus Ginn asked if the current strategy – integrated services and demand management – would be enough to deliver the necessary savings through to 2020. Dave McNamara said it would but there were likely to be additional pressures in that timeframe.

Councillor Ginn asked if demand management would lead to a risk of keeping children in unsuitable family environments. Clare Chamberlain said the Council would never leave a child in a dangerous home, regardless of the cost. Demand

management in this area meant more effective work with families through Focus on Practice.

Councillor Ginn asked if spending had shifted to focus on preventative work. Steve Miley said it had – more investment was being put into the early stages which was better for children and families – and cheaper overall for the Council.

Councillor Alan De'Ath asked if there was work that could be done with social workers to improve retention – reducing turnover of staff and improving outcomes. Clare Chamberlain said Focus on Practice was doing this and improvements had already been seen.

Councillor Max Schmid paid tribute to Dave McNamara, Clare Chamberlain, and Steve Miley – noting that they had put forward some of the most creative and innovative proposals across the whole Council. The Chair also thanked those involved and said how good it was to see that the budget clearly had children's needs at its heart.

RESOLVED

That the Committee considered the budget proposals and recommended approval at Cabinet and Full Council.

11. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee requested the following changes to the work programme:

- The Childcare Sufficiency report to be moved to February 2017.
- Add an item on the possibility of introducing a workload kite mark for schools – a scheme was running in Nottingham and was being trialled in Ealing – aimed at reducing the workload of teachers and improving recruitment and retention.
- Add an item on apprenticeships.
- Add an item on the placement review.
- Add an item on permanency, adoption and fostering in June.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on 27 February 2017.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.55 pm

Chair

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