

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
**Children and Education Policy
and Accountability Committee
Minutes**



Monday 29 January 2018

PRESENT

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

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

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

Officers: Steve Miley (Director for Children's Services), Peter Smith (Head of Policy and Strategy), Kim Dero (Chief Executive), Alistair Ayers (Head of Emergency Services), Hitesh Jolapara (Strategic Finance Director), Dave McNamara (Director for Finance & Resources in Children's Services), Helen Farrell (Assistant Director for Looked after Children and Care Leavers), Lauren Fernback (Head of the Virtual School), and Bev Sharpe (Director for Family Services)

Guests: Elizabeth Stevenson (Headteacher of Lady Margaret School), Wayne Leeming (Headteacher of Melcombe Primary School), and Michelle Barrett (Headteacher of Vanessa Nursery)

CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

With great sadness, the Chair announced that Philippa O'Driscoll (Westminster Diocesan Education Service Representative) had passed away on Monday 15 January. She had a genuine passion for education and took a leading role on her Governing Body on safeguarding, SEND, and looked after children. She leaves behind her a legacy of children in Fulham who had their lives enhanced by her efforts. Philippa was survived by Adrian, Laura and Stephen. The Committee observed a minute of silence in her memory.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2017 were agreed as an accurate record.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Caroline Ffiske, Councillor Elaine Chumnerly, and Nadia Taylor.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. DIRECTOR'S UPDATE REPORT

Steve Miley (Director for Children's Services) presented the report that provided an overview of recent developments in Children's Services. He highlighted the following:

- The positive Ofsted inspections at Kenmont Primary School and Hurlingham Academy.
- Work still to do on Education Health and Care Plan transfers to meet the deadline of 1 April 2018.
- The investments Family Services had made in preventative work listed in section 4 of the report.
- The work H&F had done to take care of a vulnerable unaccompanied asylum-seeking child who had been stranded in Greece for over a year and qualified for sanctuary in the UK under the Dubs amendment.

Nandini Ganesh asked when Ofsted would inspect the Council's Special Educational Needs and Disability services under the new framework noted in the report. Steve Miley replied it could take place any time within the next four years.

5. CABINET MEMBER'S VERBAL UPDATE

Councillor Sue Macmillan gave an overview of her activities as Cabinet Member for Children and Education since the previous meeting – including visits to Fulham College Boys School and Phoenix High School.

Councillor Macmillan then took a moment to tell the story of Steven Wiltshire, an architectural artist, who had attended Queensmill School from the age of five. As a young child, his only hobby was drawing – his first word was 'paper'. The teachers at Queensmill helped to nurture his prodigious artistic talent and at the age of just 8 years old, former Prime Minister Edward Heath commissioned him to draw Salisbury Cathedral. He went on to have a glittering career with exhibitions around the world and was honoured with an MBE in 2006, the same year he opened a permanent gallery in the Royal Opera Arcade, Pall Mall.

In their 2014 manifesto, the Administration had promised strong links with parents' groups – and at an early meeting with Parentsactive they made a powerful case for a centre for disabled children in the borough. With heartfelt thanks to Queens Manor Primary School, Parentsactive, and Dave McNamara (Director for Finance and Resources, Children's Services) Councillor Macmillan announced the 'Steven Wiltshire Centre', a place for all disabled children and their families in the borough to enjoy for many years to come.

6. A DRAFT CONSULTATIVE REPORT ON H&F COUNCIL'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO MAJOR INCIDENTS IN JUNE AND SEPTEMBER 2017

Peter Smith (Head of Policy and Strategy) introduced the draft report and noted that in 2017 there were two major incidents in and around Hammersmith & Fulham that required the authority to implement its emergency planning procedures – the fire at Grenfell Tower in June and an explosion on a tube train in Parsons Green in September. The report reviewed the Council's response to those incidents at both strategic and operational levels and considered the views of local businesses and community organisations that participated in a 'hackathon' event convened by the Council to examine the views of partners.

The report identified action taken to improve the Council's readiness and response to major incidents and made recommendations for additional action for further improvements. The Committee was invited to discuss the report's findings and consider the draft recommendations.

Elizabeth Stevenson (Headteacher of Lady Margaret School), Wayne Leeming (Headteacher of Melcombe Primary School), and Michelle Barrett (Headteacher of Vanessa Nursery) attended to provide the schools' perspective on the Parsons Green incident and wider emergency planning issues.

Wayne Leeming said Headteachers wanted a central point of contact in case of an emergency to ensure they were getting the right messages quickly and efficiently. During the Parsons Green incident, a number of schools in the area didn't know what was going on and were hearing conflicting stories from parents. Peter Smith noted that a recommendation in the report addressed that issue. Kim Dero (Chief Executive) added that the Council had also commissioned a separate piece of work on emergency planning – and that had stressed the importance of a single point of contact. A key lesson from the Grenfell Tower incident was that social media moves a lot faster than local authority communications. At the Hackathon, community organisations and residents said they wanted a faster way to keep in touch and to that end officers were exploring the use of WhatsApp groups etc.

Michelle Barrett reiterated the need for clear communications with schools – noting that many parents would come to the school first for information about an incident.

Elizabeth Stevenson made the following points:

- It would be useful for school staff to have training on how to manage media messages.
- The emergency plan should be flexible so it could adapt to changing situations.
- Schools needed help in the aftermath of an emergency event. Students might need support for weeks after an incident takes place.

Kim Dero agreed that support over the longer term was key. Resilience professionals spoke about the ripple effect – events can have long lasting impacts on people and we shouldn't underestimate the effects it can have on the community. After Grenfell H&F established a team to reassure people in tower blocks in the borough that they were safe.

Alistair Ayers (Head of Emergency Services) agreed that any emergency plan needed to be flexible. H&F had an overarching generic plan with more specific event-specific plans beneath that. There were also London-wide plans that sat above those. Officers were refreshing the local plans with the community and planning exercises and training to support that.

Councillor Alan De'Ath suggested holding regular drills between the Council and Headteachers to ensure the communications network was working correctly. Kim Dero agreed and felt this would build confidence. She said that a number of opportunities were being planned for spring and summer.

Nandini Ganesh (Parentsactive representative) asked if there were specific plans in place to support SEND children and young people during emergency situations.

Alistair Ayers said the Council would identify vulnerable people in an emergency. It had been recognised that H&F lacked information on vulnerable children during the Parsons Green incident but that was being resolved going forward.

Matt Jenkins (teacher representative) said it was important that when children transferred schools, the correct information was shared. That should happen through SENCOs but it wasn't consistent in all schools. Steve Miley said the process was there but perhaps there needed to be stronger recognition of its importance. He would ask officers to follow up on this with schools.

The Chair said that children's need for play was vitally important to their wellbeing and development and noted that the local Play Associations have people who can provide sessions at short notice who could be used for displaced families. The Chair also felt emergency response training should be a part of the induction for all councillors following the next election in May.

The Chair noted that the schools close to Grenfell Tower were asked to close the day after the tragedy but they opened anyway because staff recognised the importance of stability in children's lives. She asked officers to think about how to keep this continuity if there was an emergency in the borough. Michelle Barrett added that children should be housed as closely as possible so they can continue to attend their school.

The Chair thanked the headteachers for their contributions.

RESOLVED

That the Committee discussed the findings and recommendations of the report and made suggestions (above) for the Council to consider in its response.

7. CHILDREN'S SERVICES BUDGET PROPOSALS 2018-19

Hitesh Jolapara (Strategic Finance Director) introduced the report that set out the budget proposals for the services covered by the Committee. He gave a presentation that showed the context of the scale of the challenge facing local government in recent years. H&F's general government grant had reduced from £160m in 2010/11

to £90m by 2018/19. He noted that the 2018/19 budget assumed a continued freeze in council tax and no increase in fees and charges in Children's Services, Adult Social Care, and Housing Services.

Dave McNamara (Director for Finance & Resources in Children's Services) then gave a presentation on the Children's Services budget – noting the following:

- Spending was moving towards prevention in the early years which was both better for families and saved money over time as fewer children entered care.
- The service had successfully bid for growth funding of £1.8m to build a Disabled Children's Resource Centre, improve SEN passenger transport, set up a new improved SEN service, and support Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.
- The key risk areas were around potential increases in entrants to care and high placement costs.

Councillor Marcus Ginn asked how Section 106 funding was being used – and if it was being used for any ongoing revenue costs. Hitesh Jolapara noted that Section 106 funding came with specific rules and regulations around how it could be used. The Council was using the flexible elements of funding to support the revenue budget.

Councillor Marcus Ginn noted that the Moving On programme (H&F coming out of the tri-borough arrangements with Kensington and Westminster Councils) involved 14 redundancies and asked if this reduction in staff was necessitated by the budget. Steve Miley clarified that there were now just 5 members of staff at risk of redundancy in Children's Services and all were on the Council's internal redeployment register.

Councillor Ginn asked if the service was spending more money on early intervention work than last year. Steve Miley said that was the ambition but it was complicated by rapid changes in the residential care market – the costliest area for the service. It had become very difficult to source appropriate placements and unit costs have gone up significantly. In the last six months the service had created two bespoke children's home for very challenging young people at a high cost to the Council, simply because there was no appropriate provision available. Councillor Sue Macmillan (Cabinet Member for Children and Education) added that this was one of the central reasons for creation of IFSS - an independent service that could work more closely with health services and bring in funding through grants and traded services.

Nandini Ganesh (Parentsactive representative) asked what the high needs block (funding for SEND provision) position was. Dave McNamara explained that H&F received the lowest funding from the Government for the high needs block out of all London boroughs. Officers were in discussion with the Department for Education about this but were not expecting any more money coming in until the spending review next Autumn.

Councillor Alan De'Ath said it was great to see the Council putting more money into SEND – particularly with the creation of the new Disabled Children's Resource Centre.

Councillor De'Ath asked what the impact of the business rates review was. Hitesh Jolapara said the pilot modelling suggested no Council would be any worse off and H&F could get an increase in the range of £2.6m. Councillor De'Ath said he had concerns about increases in business rates – particularly the impact it would have on small businesses.

RESOLVED

That the Committee considered the budget proposals.

8. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17

Helen Farrell (Assistant Director for Looked after Children and Care Leavers) presented the report that highlighted the responsibilities the local authority had in relation to Looked After Children and Care Leavers, and how it discharged those responsibilities. She noted that outcomes over the past year had continued to be very positive. The children and young people showed real progress from when they came into care, including a 13 percent improvement in 5 A to Cs at GCSE level and an increase in Care Leavers attending universities.

Lauren Fernback (Head of the Virtual School) noted that it had also been a good year for the virtual school - 93 percent of young people were either in education, employment, or training – with a rising number were attending university.

The Chair asked about this year's cohort and if officers expected these positive trends to continue. Lauren Fernback explained that this year's cohort was very complex, with a number having significant special educational needs. In addition, there were a number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and young people who hadn't been in school very long. Despite those challenges, she expected the numbers going to university to increase as well as apprenticeships and other routes into work. Bev Sharpe (Director for Family Services) reiterated that the cohort coming in were incredibly complex and the placement choice was limited. The Council was using the LAC Assist team to stabilise them in placements but it was slow and labour-intensive work.

Vic Daniels (school governor representative) asked what happened to the UASC cohort when they reached the aged of 18. Helen Farrell explained that they were the Council's responsibility up to the age of 25 – beyond that it depended on the decisions of the Home Office but officers would support them through those processes.

Vic Daniels asked how looked after children's outcomes compared with other children and young people. Officers said there was a significant gap between looked after children and their peers but this reflected their life chances before they entered care. Councillor De'Ath suggested officers used the newer progress measures (like Progress 8) as it would make the impact of care clearer. Lauren Fernback said they would be doing this from next year onwards.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted the report.

9. WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was noted.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for 12 March 2018.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.00 pm

Chair

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