

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



Monday 28 January 2019

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Alan De'Ath (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)

Officers: Kim Dero (Chief Executive), Steve Miley (Director for Children's Services), Bev Sharpe (Assistant Director for Family Services), Mandy Lawson (Assistant Director of SEND), Tony Burton (Head of Finance, Children's Services), Kevin Gordon (Head of Assets Operations Programmes), David Abbott (Scrutiny Manager)

1. MINUTES

Matt Jenkins noted that the reference on page 5 to the 'National Union of Teachers' should be changed to the 'National Education Union'.

Matt Jenkins asked if the '500 youth organisations' working in Hammersmith & Fulham (Page 6) were coordinated by the Council. Officers said most were already known to the Council and there was ongoing work being done to collate information on the groups for signposting purposes.

Denis Charman said he had taken the topic of youth violence and knife crime back to schools and reported that there was genuine interest amongst support staff to input into a broader strategy. Steve Miley (Director for Children's Services) said there was an opportunity for all sectors to shape the Council's response. It was recognised that support staff were sometimes overlooked but they had a valuable contribution to make.

RESOLVED

With the correction noted above, the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 November 2018 were approved as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Larry Culhane (Cabinet Member for Children and Education), Vic Daniels (Co-opted Member), and Jan Parnell (Assistant Director for Education).

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS ANNUAL REPORT

Bev Sharpe (Assistant Director for Family Services) presented the report that highlighted the significant responsibilities the local authority has in relation to looked after children (LAC) and care leavers and how it discharged those responsibilities.

Bev Sharpe noted that the number of looked after children had increased nationally by 8.75% since 2014 to 75,420. During the same 4-year period, numbers in Hammersmith and Fulham had increased by 12.7% to 230 – equivalent to 64 per 10,000 of the child population. Since the report was written these numbers had increased further to 245. In response to these increases the Council had invested in the Family Assist and LAC Assist teams and they were working hard on placement stability. There had also been a sharp increase in care leavers due to 2017 legislation that gave councils a duty to support care leavers up to the age of 25.

The Chair asked why there had been such a significant increase in the number of looked after children in recent years. Bev Sharpe said there was a range of factors – austerity, older children were entering the system. Steve Miley (Director for Children's Services) said he had noticed a change – traditional social work was about protecting children within the family (mental health, domestic violence, drugs and alcohol etc.) but now on top of that there was also the influence of peers, people being exploited or pushed into dangerous behaviours like drugs and knife crime. Rather than just having to deal with a family the problems were shaped by the whole community. In response to this the Council was thinking about how to reshape its services to be more effective. This was an issue across the Country and Councils were talking about 'contextual safeguarding' - going beyond just the family.

Matt Jenkins asked if the Council received any additional support from Government given the increase in looked after children. Steve Miley said there was no additional support. The entire cost was borne by the Council.

Councillor Alexandra Sanderson asked about the gender ratio of children coming into care – why were there almost twice as many boys as girls? Bev Sharpe said the difference was largely due to the number of older teenage boys coming into care system.

Councillor Sanderson noted the number of placement moves of three or above had gone up (page 15) - she asked if this was a trend and what more the Council could do to bring this number down. Bev Sharpe said officers were looking at what more they could do to support carers. Social workers did try to place children with in-house foster carers where possible.

Councillor Sanderson noted only 4 children were adopted in both 2016-17 and 2017-18. She asked how many children were eligible for adoption during those periods. Bev Sharpe said adoption numbers were very low across the Country due to Government legislation that requires Councils to explore every option for keeping babies within the family. That has meant fewer young children being placed for adoptions.

Councillor Sanderson then moved on to CAMHS (9.3 and 9.4 of the report) - she asked if there were challenges with people moving out of borough and losing support. Bev Sharpe said there was and that had always been a problem for the service. Looked after children do have CAMHS support that will follow a young person if they move but long-term support should be secured through a local GP and it can be very hard to get young people into local services because the waiting lists are so long.

Councillor Lucy Richardson asked what services the Council offers to 18-25 year olds. She noted that employment figures and apprenticeship figures were down – and asked was the Council doing anything to address those issues? Did the Council track outcomes? Bev Sharpe noted that H&F had a very ambitious 'virtual school' (led by Amelia Steele) that was working to develop apprenticeship opportunities. She was confident those numbers have improved since the report was written. Steve Miley added that the figures related to a small cohort, so percentages were swayed by very small movements. There was still more to do on non-academic pathways though.

Councillor Richardson asked for more information on the Council's plans for housing foster carers locally. Steve Miley said this was a challenge due to the borough's accommodation profile. Many fostering applicants don't have spare bedrooms for example. Bev Sharpe added that the Council was currently looking at a scheme to lend money for home improvements to foster carers. In addition, officers were bidding for funding from the Mayor's Office for housing schemes. The Council also had a contract with Centrepoin for 72 beds in borough for young people of 18 years and above.

Councillor Asif Siddique asked if there were any limits on the number of children that the Council could take into care in any given year, given the department's limited budget. Bev Sharpe said while they did have a fixed budget, Children's Services would always provide support where there was a child or family in need. The department tried to keep costs down where possible by looking at kinship carers and in-house placements. The biggest pressures on the department's budget were commissioned independent foster carer agency places or residential placements.

Councillor Mark Loveday noted that there were 230 looked after children in total and of them, 72 percent were in foster placements – mostly out of the borough, and a

very small number were in adoption. He asked where the remainder were placed? Steve Miley said the other young people were in semi-independent accommodation. That was a stepping stone from family-based care to living on their own in their own property. Councillor Loveday asked how the 72 Centrepoint beds fitted in. Bev Sharpe said they were for young people aged 16-18 years old and care leavers – young people for whom the Council had a parenting responsibility.

Councillor Loveday asked where the residential care placements were – were they out of the borough? Steve Miley said they were spread across the Country - Kent, the North of England, Scotland. There was a shortage of placements for hard-to-place young people. Children's Services were working with Commissioning colleagues to find the most appropriate placements.

Councillor Loveday noted that in the past, members of the Committee would have visited these placements to ensure they were up to standard – but this couldn't be done anymore given they were so far away. Officers assured members that there were independent visitors who carried out safeguarding visits.

Councillor Loveday, looking at page 12 of the report, noted that the number of looked after children categorised as 'citizens' had remained roughly stable going back to 2014 but there had been significant increases in UASC from 2014 to 2015 – then continuing on in 2016, 2017, and 2018. He asked if this picture was similar going further back, beyond 2014. Steve Miley said going back the 'citizen' number was much higher. 10 years ago, it was in the 400s (as compared with 197 in 2018). UASC numbers have fluctuated. There has been a genuine pressure in numbers on London as a whole. All councils in London took a percent of the UASC population but proposals to share the number across the Country didn't happen so the pressure has been greater.

Councillor Loveday noted the additional 15 UASC 'Dubs' children that were separate to the Home Office allocation. He asked why the report stated the Home Office allocation should have been 25 but the table on page 12 showed 33 including 1 Dubs child. Steve Miley said it was possible for the Council to go above the threshold if, for example, an asylum seeker turned up at the police station in Shepherd's Bush they would become H&F's responsibility.

Nandini Ganesh asked if the Council assessed UASC children for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) - and how they tracked people with SEND beyond the age of 25. Mandy Lawson (Assistant Director of SEND) said UASC children were not treated any differently to any other child entering care. They would be allocated virtual school help, go through the usual processes of assessments and support. If they had SEND needs they would be introduced to the disabled children's team. Care leavers had two pathways - if they are able to live independently they go through the standard care leavers pathway – if not they would be referred to Adult Social Care.

Councillor Sanderson noted that she was proud of H&F for sending social workers out to the Calais migrant camps and supporting the children there.

Councillor Sanderson noted the amazing outcomes in 10.3 of the report, including young people winning places to study at Cambridge and Central St. Martins. She asked if there was support for those young people while they were at University, like peer-to-peer support? And did care leavers who have achieved great things come back and inspire the next generation of care leavers? Bev Sharpe assured members that there was support available. She also noted that a care leaver who is currently qualifying to be a doctor is developing a mentoring scheme for care leavers.

Councillor Sanderson noted the figure of 4 percent of care leavers in custody (13.4 of the report). She asked if that meant they were in prison or if it included those on remand. She also asked how this compared with national figures. Bev Sharpe responded that H&F's custody rates were very good. The looked after children and youth offending teams worked very closely together to keep those figures low.

The Chair drew attention to the fact that H&F was the first Council to introduce Council Tax exemptions for care leavers (13.5 of the report). Since the introduction in April 2017, another 35 Councils have implemented the same scheme.

Kim Dero (Chief Executive) asked why children identified as having a black and / or minority ethnic background accounted for 41% of Looked After Children in 2017-18. Steve Miley said the figures reflected the social make-up of the borough.

The Chair asked how successful the Council had been in recruiting diverse foster carers. Bev Sharpe said they did have very diverse group of foster carers and social worker tried to carefully match cultural backgrounds.

Nandini Ganesh asked if a child with complex behaviours was kept in care overnight – would they be classified as 'looked after'. Steve Miley said that wouldn't automatically mean they were 'looked after' – the definition was 75 nights in one year, or 17 nights in row to be classified as 'looked after'. Otherwise they would be considered a 'child in need'.

Councillor Sanderson asked what support kinship carers would get from the Council? Bev Sharpe said they would receive fostering support, join support groups, get social worker visits etc. Councillor Sanderson asked if the support groups had crèches. Bev Sharpe said they didn't, but all carers were encouraged to have a support carer - who would be checked by social workers and the police – who could look after the children while the main carer is out.

The Chair asked how the assessment of Corporate Parenting was measured. What could the Committee do to hold the Council to account in this area? Bev Sharpe said there was a Corporate Parenting Board and a steering group. They were also looking to set up an advisory board so young people could be more involved in the planning process. Officers gave young people the opportunity to provide feedback on their services and support through regular consultations that they reported to the Board.

Councillor Loveday noted this was a challenge given that the majority of young people were now out of the borough. Officers said they all have an allocated social

worker and see them regularly. The department's aim was that all looked after children received the same level of service, in or out of the borough.

The Chair thought it would be good for the Committee to look into this area further and see if any improvements could be made. Bev Sharpe said there was definitely still development work to do – i.e. how can we engage with other departments better (apprenticeships, Housing etc.).

The Chair noted the educational attainment figures in the report but said it would be more useful to know the figures on progress. Bev Sharpe said the virtual school did track this data and could provide the figures. Steve Miley added that all of the national research showed that children's attainment improves through care.

ACTION: Bev Sharpe

Eleanor Allen asked for figures on special guardianship orders – for those who were no longer in care but where the Council continued to provide support. Steve Miley noted that these had now exceeded adoption numbers, it was an important pathway out of care. He said he could provide figures outside of the meeting.

ACTION: Steve Miley

RESOLVED

The Committee commented on and noted the report.

5. 2019 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Tony Burton (Head of Finance, Children's Services) presented the report that set out the budget proposals for the Children's Services and provided an update on proposed changes in fees and charges.

Steve Miley (Director for Children's Services) noted that the department's approach to identifying potential savings had been consistent with the vision for Children's Services which was:

'To improve the lives and life chances of our children and young people; intervene early to give the best start in life and promote wellbeing; ensure children and young people are protected from harm; and that all children have access to an excellent education and achieve their potential. All of this will be done whilst reducing costs and improving service effectiveness.'

Tony Burton gave a presentation on the budget and highlighted the following points:

- Children's Services net expenditure was £33m.
- The total budget was £126.7m including £92m of income (mainly from the Dedicated Schools Grant) and other grants of £33.9m.
- The Family Services budget was £30m and this included significant growth in the areas of placement spend on looked after children and care leavers and to enable the social care team to respond to Increased demand pressures.

- There was still a lot of uncertainty for schools around education funding and they had seen significant pressures on their budgets in recent years.
- The high needs block deficit was the single most concerning financial pressure for Children's Services. To tackle it the department was looking to deliver services that meet children's needs at lower levels and keep more children in mainstream schools.

Nandini Ganesh commented that many schools didn't understand how to support children with SEND issues. Officers said they were working closely with schools to improve the support on offer. Inclusion was a key priority for the service going forward. The Council had to reshape its services to help mainstream schools with inclusion. Denise Fox (Headteacher of Fulham College Girls) said Alternate Provision used to be what happened in mainstream schools. There used to be ways of managing children within the school but now it was all external and provided at greater cost. Schools and the Council needed to find ways of providing Alternate Provision in different ways.

Matt Jenkins asked if there was any additional support the Council could offer to schools. Steve Miley said the Council recognised that the increase in funding from the Government didn't cover the cost pressures schools faced and they were in a really challenging financial situation. He had asked schools how they were managing and they all said they were looking at ways of reducing staffing - which had a real impact on them. As the Council was also facing significant cost pressures it couldn't give schools additional funding - but officers were looking at ways to work together and share costs, share support, look at ways to increase the income for schools, and fill school places where rolls were low.

Officers were also working on a proposal to rebuild some schools in the borough - improving the educational environment for children and bring in funding to help the education system. Councillor Mark Loveday asked which sites had been identified for redevelopment. Kevin Gordon (Head of Assets Operations Programmes) said the sites were listed in a Cabinet report that was due to be released in the next few weeks. Denis Charman asked if this programme only raised money for the school that was being developed or the wider community of schools. Steve Miley assured the Committee that the programme was designed to manage the overall financial situation of the wider education system.

Tony Burton continued his presentation, highlighting some of the key savings proposal in the budget including better procurement of housing for care leavers and developing more experienced foster carers to help children 'step down' from residential care. He then noted some of the key areas of growth - including placements costs for looked after children and care leavers - and money to support Dubs children who were ageing over 18 (as Home Office grant funding reduced significantly at that age).

Hitesh Jolapara (Strategic Director for Finance and Governance) gave a short presentation outlining the wider financial context for local government and the ongoing financial challenges that Council's face. He noted that for 2019/20 the forecast budget gap, before savings, was £10.3m, rising to £48.6m by 2022/23.

Councillor Mark Loveday, noting the significant funding shortfall in the high needs block of £4m a year, asked what the deficit recovery plan was. Steve Miley said the high needs block deficit was the biggest financial challenge in Children's Services and it couldn't be managed through the normal savings processes. To address this issue the Council was undertaking a school rebuilding programme - using the opportunity to improve school buildings and make better use of valuable land in the borough. To reduce the overspend the department was in discussions about changing the way it meets children's needs.

Councillor Loveday asked what this would actually mean for schools and the SEND services provided. Officers explained that it would mean more children supported in mainstream schools and escalating fewer children up to alternative and specialist provision. Special schools could also help mainstream schools - using their resources better across the borough. He noted that he didn't expect this to change quickly - it would be a long term iterative process.

At the moment parents think the only way of getting the support their children need is through an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). For example, currently the only way to get speech and language therapy was through an EHCP.

The Council's ambition was to put services in place that were accessible without going through the expensive bureaucracy of the EHCP process. This would also free up SENCOs to work more directly with children rather than doing endless paperwork.

Councillor Loveday asked when the Committee would be presented with this new strategy. Steve Miley said it was in the formal planning stages - officers were having a series of meetings with schools and Headteachers to develop a programme together. The Chair noted that this was an important area for the Committee to scrutinise in more detail in future.

ACTION: Item to be added to the work programme

Councillor Lucy Richardson asked if the Council was doing anything to promote inclusion in special schools - i.e. encouraging students, where appropriate, to move into mainstream schools. Steve Miley responded that Headteachers have said the current system was too binary. We needed to support a spectrum of need from mainstream schools, to specialist units, to special school. There needed to be more choice and greater flexibility in the system.

Councillor Lucy Richardson asked what the savings for travel care and support would mean for the service. Mandy Lawson said the savings covered a range of efficiencies. For example, when taxis were used they automatically provided an escort, but it wasn't always necessary. The team were working to move people to be more independent. Officers were also looking at rationalising the routes and were renegotiating contracts with providers.

Councillor Lucy Richardson asked what educational psychology key working was. Mandy Lawson said that was part of the new integrated key working service. There was a gap around the first point of identification and diagnosis - parents didn't have

anywhere to go. Now there was a single point of contact to coordinate and arrange potential pathways for their children.

Councillor Asif Siddique asked if officers expected the deficit to increase because of Britain leaving the EU in March 2019. Hitesh Jolapara said it was very hard to predict - inflation going up was a big risk. There were also major risks around the staffing impacts of EU nationals leaving - and risk to the local economy.

Matt Jenkins asked if the plans to support more students with SEND in mainstream schools meant schools would have to take on additional costs. Steve Miley said the Council was not expecting schools to absorb additional costs - instead we wanted to fund what children really need. The high needs block doesn't have to just fund children with EHCPs.

Merhawit Ghebre (resident) asked if young people were part of the planning process for the schools building programme. Kevin Gordon said it was very important to get the model right and the Council wanted to be collaborative. There were some consultation groups in place and it was important to have the voice of young people represented throughout all of our planning.

The Chair noted that he would like this to be an item at a future meeting and the Committee should invite young people and parents to give their views on the proposals.

ACTION: Add item to the work programme

Councillor Mark Loveday asked if the £2.2m of growth for Family Services was based on increases seen over the last couple of years projected forward. Steve Miley said that figure was based on the steady state of the current cohort and their costs going forward.

Councillor Mark Loveday asked if it would make a significant difference if the caseload reduced by 10. Tony Burton responded that it was not just the number of cases but also their increasing complexity. Greater complexity leads to higher placement costs.

Councillor Mark Loveday noted the proposed savings of £600k for enhanced fostering and asked if, given what the Committee has heard about the pressures and increase in complexity, that was a realistic figure. Kevin Gordon said officers had carefully modelled the savings. H&F had a premiere fostering service and it gets many inquiries from out of the borough. There was a good supply of foster carers and the principle fostering manager was becoming a nationally recognised expert in dealing with challenging behaviours. The savings were modelled on five placements with an average saving of over £100k per placement.

Denis Charman (School Governor and NUE representative) wanted to note that as a Governor he appreciated what the Council was doing to support schools. He added that in the last national consultation on the fair funding formula for schools funding Hammersmith & Fulham contributed 10 percent of the total responses and that had a real impact on the proposals. He asked if there would be further lobbying by the Council to see if there was anything more that could be done to protect schools'

budgets. The Chair agreed that the Council's lobbying had contributed to the Government rethinking their proposals and said the Council would do all it could in future to fight for schools in the borough.

RESOLVED

That the Committee considered and commented on the budget proposals.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as 25 March 2019.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.40 pm

Chair

Contact officer David Abbott
Scrutiny Manager
Governance and Scrutiny
Tel 020 8753 2063
E-mail: david.abbott@lbhf.gov.uk