

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Children and Education Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Wednesday 30 June 2021

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Alexandra Sanderson (Chair), Lucy Richardson, Asif Siddique, Mercy Umeh 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)

Cabinet Member

Councillor Larry Culhane (Cabinet Member for Children and Education)

Officers

Jacqui McShannon (Director of Children's Services)
Tony Burton (Head of Finance)
Mandy Lawson (Assistant Director, Education and Disabilities)
Jan Parnell (Director of Education)
Sarah Bright (Assistant Director, Children's Commissioning)
Lesley Bell (Strategic Lead, Children's Commissioning)
Amana Gordon (Operational Director, Children and Young Peoples Service)
Jo Pymont (Assistant Director, Performance and Improvement)
Alison Markwell (Head of SEND Partnerships)
Satwinder Saraon (Strategic Lead for Early Years and SEND Transformation)
Phil Tomsett (Head of Early Years)
David Abbott (Head of Governance)

External Guests

Amy Lalla (Director of LMP Group)

1. APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS FOR 2021/22

The committee noted the re-appointment of the following co-opted members for 2021/22:

- Eleanor Allen, London Diocesan Board for Schools

- Nandini Ganesh, Parentsactive Representative
- Nadia Taylor, Parent Governor Representative
- Matt Jenkins, Teacher Representative

2. MINUTES

Members noted the minutes of the meeting held on 29 March 2021.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Lucy Richardson.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No public questions were received.

6. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) UPDATE

Mandy Lawson (Assistant Director, Education and Disabilities) presented an update on services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). She was joined by Alison Markwell (Head of SEND Partnerships) and Satwinder Saraon (Strategic Lead for Early Years and SEND Transformation).

The Chair noted that the timescales for Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) had improved since 2017 but there was a dip in 2020/21 due to Covid. She asked if officers expected the timescales to return to pre-Covid levels soon. Mandy Lawson said Covid did have a major impact on the process, primarily because most children weren't in school so practitioners weren't able to gather information and carry out assessments. With children back in schools, officers expected the process to return to normal. But the impact of the pandemic on children was still unknown and there may be an associated increase in the level of need coming through the system.

The Chair asked if the improvement in inclusivity over the last year was due to online / remote working and if that would continue. Mandy Lawson said remote meetings were less daunting for young people. The Youth Council had been very inviting and adapted its practices to ensure more people were included. The Council had also

employed young adults to work with the Youth Council to ensure the voice of young people was included.

Nandini Ganesh noted that SEN support and inclusion would be used to bridge the High Needs Block funding gap and asked how SEN support would be monitored. She also noted that demand for EHCPs was increased significantly (13%) year-on-year so how would that be balanced with lower-level support and inclusion?

Mandy Lawson clarified that demand for EHCPs wasn't increasing by 13% year-on-year, but there was an increase each year. If a child had complex needs, they should have an EHCP. The problem with the current system was that it forced people into applying for EHCPs to access certain provision like speech and language therapy. Speech and language therapy had been identified as a key area for improvement and Satwinder Saraon (Strategic Lead for Early Years and SEND Transformation) noted that officers were developing a more rigorous and robust early intervention offer in this area to support children with emerging needs and those waiting for multi-disciplinary assessments.

Nandini Ganesh noted that 49 percent of children were from outside the borough and asked if in-borough children were prioritised. Mandy Lawson said the borough was fortunate to have four special schools and more places than the borough needed. The legal framework didn't allow local authorities to ring-fence places, but officers were able to identify early which children needed places and apply for them early.

Councillor Mark Loveday asked for an update on the high needs block overspend situation.

Mandy Lawson said the High Needs Block transformation programme was about ensuring money was spent in the right place at the right time, using early intervention to avoid higher costs later on. The DfE had approved the Council's plans and as part of that agreement they will offset a significant amount of the deficit, to be paid off in stages over the next four years.

Councillor Loveday asked the following questions:

- How many children were planned to be reallocated from special to mainstream schools?
- How many children were involved in the pilot?
- If the planned reallocation would make special schools unsustainable?

Mandy Lawson said she could share figures outside of the meeting. She said special schools wouldn't become unsustainable, they had huge numbers of applications and had to turn many people down due to capacity. The issue for the Council was that children should be in the right provision for their needs and the right pathway to the next steps of their education. There would always be special schools for those children who needed them.

ACTION: Mandy Lawson

Matthew Jenkins asked if there was funding to support the continued increase in children year on year – and if not, what could we do to secure more? Mandy Lawson

said the funding was driven by a formula based on local population with additional factors applied. The formula had disadvantaged H&F in the past because it was partly based on historical spend, which was relatively low in H&F, but that had been corrected and the borough was in a better place moving forward.

Nandini Ganesh asked if officers had data on transition destinations – how many H&F residents went into supported employment programmes, how many were given housing etc. Mandy Lawson said she would follow up with colleagues and circulate an answer.

ACTION: Mandy Lawson

Eleanor Allen asked for more information on the Positive Behaviour Support Service. Mandy Lawson said it was a new service, jointly commissioned with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) for children with complex learning difficulties or autism who presented with behaviours that placed themselves or their families at risk of harm. The cohort required specialist support to help keep them safe and enable them to pursue opportunities that their behaviour might otherwise restrict.

7. SUMMER IN THE CITY: THE BIG LEARNING TENT - OUR VISION FOR THE H&F SUMMER PROGRAMME

Lesley Bell (Strategic Lead, Children's Commissioning) presented the item on the Council's summer activity programme for young people in the borough. The programme was designed and delivered in partnership with Let Me Play Ltd. Amy Lalla (Director of LMP Group) also attended for the item.

The Chair asked if Covid and the Delta variant had impacted the programme. Amy Lalla said it was at the forefront of their minds - contingency plans were in place, all providers had Covid safety plans and risk assessments in place, and they were passing on best practice to providers. The programme was designed using a layered approach so it could be scaled back or changed depending on restrictions at the time. Lesley Bell added that the programme had been through H&F's rigorous internal corporate process too.

The Chair asked how the programme would be marketed. Amy Lalla said it was marketed through the Council's website and newsletters, through schools, through the providers networks, and on social media. Lesley Bell added that they had used social workers, headteachers, and school networks to promote it. The Youth Council also helped with design and communications to appeal to young people. The Chair commented that Councillors would be happy to promote it in their wards.

Matthew Jenkins asked what requirements were in place to ensure providers were aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. Lesley Bell said all providers had to meet certain safeguarding conditions as part of the commissioning / grant process. Amy Lalla added that all providers had to complete safeguarding training and all designated safeguarding leads had face-to-face visits.

Councillor Larry Culhane (Cabinet Member for Children and Education) paid tribute to the organisations involved and thanked Let Me Play for the great support they had

provided to schools. He also paid tribute to the borough's schools, the majority of which stayed open throughout the lockdowns to support vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

8. CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Jan Parnell (Director of Education) introduced the item that provided an overview of the annual childcare sufficiency assessment. She was joined by Satwinder Saraon (Strategic Lead for Early Years, Education and SEND Transformation) and Phil Tomsett (Head of Early Years).

The Chair asked:

- Why take-up was low?
- How H&F's take-up compared to other boroughs?
- How was the offer promoted?
- How could the Council reach out to groups who weren't engaging?

Phil Tomsett said take-up was low compared to H&F's statistical neighbours. That was partly due to the impacts of Covid – the 3 and 4 year offer was down 6 percent and the 2 year offer was down 10 percent. Providers said that was due to anxieties of families of children attending group sessions, particularly those in multi-generational households. But take-up was also relatively low pre-Covid. Officers were working with the Department for Education to develop a take-up strategy. Some of the groups identified, like the Somali community in White City, had arranged childcare in their own community. To encourage take-up officers wanted to develop a community champion approach, which had been successful in other boroughs. They also wanted to simplify the process to make it easier to access.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting: 16 November 2021

Meeting started: 6.30 pm
Meeting ended: 8.36 pm

Chair

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