

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Children and Education Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Tuesday 16 November 2021

NOTE: This was held as an informal remote meeting

PRESENT

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

Co-opted members: Nandini Ganesh (Parentsactive Representative) and Matt Jenkins (Teacher Representative)

Other Councillors

Councillor Larry Culhane (Cabinet Member for Children and Education)

Officers

Jacqui McShannon (Director of Children's Services)

Mandy Lawson (Assistant Director, Education and Disabilities)

Jan Parnell (Director of Education)

Sarah Bright (Assistant Director, Children's Commissioning)

Amana Gordon (Operational Director, Children and Young Peoples Service)

Elizabeth Spearman (Head of ACE and School Admissions)

Karen Galey (Assistant Director for the Economy)

Matthew Coulbeck (Secondary Adviser and 14-25 Development)

Tom Perrigo (Industrial Strategy Officer)

Keith Tysoe (Principal Adviser SEND and Inclusion)

Satwinder Saraon (Strategic Lead for Early Years and SEND Transformation)

Phil Tomsett (Head of Early Years)

David Abbott (Head of Governance)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Eleanor Allen and Nadia Taylor.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2021 were noted.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No questions were received.

5. ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION

Elizabeth Spearman (Head of ACE and School Admissions) presented the report that outlined the key legislation and guidance governing how the Council works with parents and carers who have elected to home educate their children. The report also discussed the impact of the pandemic on the numbers of children being electively home educated and the resource implications.

Elizabeth Spearman noted that any family can elect to home educate their children. The Council has a duty to put support in place but has no right to inspect or assess. In H&F the team has taken a robust approach – contacting all families as soon as it's known they intend to home educate and setting out our expectations on how we can work together to ensure a suitable education. The Council has a very experienced home education advisor and families worked constructively with us. She added that since the beginning of the pandemic there had been a significant increase in numbers, up to 190 at present, which may create capacity issues.

Councillor Lucy Richardson asked if officers felt the sudden rise in figures was a temporary or permanent change. And what would be the impact on resources? Elizabeth Spearman said initially officers expected the numbers to reduce over time, but they hadn't yet. And it was the same picture across the country. Officers had been encouraging parents to consider returning to school, but it was a balance – parents views had to be respected. Regarding resources, the home education advisor had been managing while discussions were online, but officers wanted to reinstate in-person contact for new families.

Nandini Ganesh noted that at the national level there were several pressure groups encouraging parents to home educate and avoid contact with the councils. She asked if that was happening in H&F. Elizabeth Spearman said most families did cooperate. Home educating families often feel passionately that they don't want state involvement. She gave a recent example of a family who were told not to engage with the Council because it might lead to us taking their children into care. Officers were working to dispel those myths. Prior to the pandemic the team held an annual event to engage families and they also organised family events like days out, theatre trips etc.

Councillor Asif Siddique asked if there was any mechanism in place to reliably communicate with the parents about key issues. Elizabeth Spearman said there was a lot of guidance online. Officers also gave parents ideas about using local and resources, and textbooks to support their children's education. The team was keen

not to recommend other providers because it wasn't possible to quality control them. But the advisor would look for gaps and steer families towards resources.

Councillor Siddique suggested putting a secure online portal for families in place. Elizabeth Spearman said officers would give it consideration. But she noted that many families wouldn't even provide the Council with an email address.

Councillor Mark Loveday asked what level of Section 437 orders the team were making – and if those number had changed since the pandemic. Elizabeth Spearman said taking legal action in the form of a school attendance order was a decision the Council didn't take lightly. To do so the Council had to prove families weren't educating children which was often very hard to do. The team did raise it as a tool to engage parents. At present there was only one order ongoing. The most during the period was six and two of those went to court.

Councillor Loveday noted the low level and asked if it was something the team wanted to use more often, or if they felt those powers should only be for very rare cases. Elizabeth Spearman said they tried to avoid them as it often wasn't in the best interests of the child. Officers made families aware of the legal framework, but their preference was to work with parents to resolve any issues. Officers weren't looking to increase the numbers, but it was important to have the option there when it as required. Elizabeth Spearman added that she would like the Department for Education (DfE) guidance around home education tightened-up. Different boroughs had quite different approaches and that could cause issues when families move.

Councillor Loveday asked if there was an opportunity for London-level coordination of home education policy. Elizabeth Spearman said she had personally pushed for greater coordination at a national level. The latest DfE guidance was partially based on H&F's guidance.

Nandini Ganesh asked if parents of children with education health and care plans could home educate and still retain access to therapies and other support. Mandy Lawson added that, if parents could meet the specification of the plan, the local authority would support them with resources as required.

Councillor Mercy Umeh asked if there had been safeguarding issues and if officers worked closely with social care colleagues to look for issues. Elizabeth Spearman said there was no evidence that children who were home educated were more at risk than those in school. The home education advisor was trained in safeguarding, but social care would have to act on any safeguarding issues.

Councillor Loveday suggested the following recommendations:

- That the Committee endorsed the Council's efforts to lobby government to improve the guidance and legal framework around elective home education.
- That the Committee endorsed greater coordination of elective home education policies between London boroughs and asked the Cabinet Member for Education to raise the issue as London Councils.

The recommendations were agreed.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee endorsed the Council's efforts to lobby government to improve the guidance and legal framework around elective home education.
2. That the Committee endorsed greater coordination of elective home education policies between London boroughs and asked the Cabinet Member for Education to raise the issue as London Councils.

6. FAMILY SUPPORT IN-HOUSE TRANSFER

Amana Gordon (Operational Director, Children and Young Peoples Service) introduced the item on the transfer of Early Help and Early Years staff and services within Family Support to Children's Services Education and Children and Young People's department. She noted that some areas for improvement had been identified, particularly around data collection, and officers had been working with the Performance and improvement and Business Intelligence teams to ensure officers had access to high quality data and quality indicators.

Councillor Lucy Richardson asked if there had been training for Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) on Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding to improve the low take up.

Satwinder Saraon (Strategic Lead for Early Years and SEND Transformation) said officers had spoken with SENCOs about why take up was low and had held webinars to go through the process and regularly review it to ensure take up was sufficient.

Councillor Richardson asked if Early Help and Early Years were now part of Family Support. Jacqui McShannon (Director of Children's Services) said Family Support incorporated several services including Early Years and Early Help. Now all those services were back in the Council's Children's Services department and more tightly integrated.

Councillor Richardson asked for clarity around the traded offer referenced in the report. Jacqui McShannon said it allowed schools to purchase an enhanced offer, e.g. additional Early Help practitioner support. Satwinder Saraon noted that all schools had access to specialist teachers across areas such as behaviour, speech and language, autism etc.

Councillor Richardson asked if officers were planning to have a data dashboard providing comparisons with other London boroughs and the London average. Jacqui McShannon noted Children's Services had invested a lot in the last two years around data for front door services to monitor their performance – and they were planning the same for Early Help.

Councillor Asif Siddique asked how the Council was communicating this change to parents – particularly the roughly 20 percent of families where English was not their first language. He also asked if there was a mechanism for families to provide

feedback to the service. Satwinder Saraon said a number of Children's Centre sessions were translated. Officers also reached out to key stakeholders like childminders and community leaders about offers and children's centre sessions. It was an area that officers were monitoring and looking at ways of improving. The Council also had the Family Information Service which provided information on services and was translated into a wide range of languages.

Councillor Mark Loveday asked why these services were not brought back into the Council's control earlier. Jacqui McShannon said the original idea was to bring services together in an innovative way, but it was never fully realised. The landscape had changed and it was decided to bring them back in-house.

Councillor Loveday noted that there were no benchmarks for the Committee to measure future performance against and asked if officers had a list of key performance indicators (KPIs) for the service. Jacqui McShannon said the service leads had a clear plan of action and areas for improvement, including qualitative data from audits. Councillor Loveday said it would be helpful for the Committee to see a clear set of KPIs. Jacqui McShannon said there would be further reports where performance can be tracked across a number of areas.

Nandini Ganesh asked if there was additional funding for nurseries where children with special needs were identified. She said Parentsactive came across a number of families where children were not accepted due additional needs. Satwinder Saraon said funding was available to all settings for children under 5 with emerging needs (including pre-diagnosis).

Nandini Ganesh made a general point that the group of services, as presented to the committee, was not that clear. She asked that future papers focussed on individual programmes, including statistics and its impact.

Councillor Mercy Umeh asked for clarification on the additional community support for families. Jacqui McShannon said it was a 'step down' service so that families finishing work with Early Help didn't experience a 'cliff edge' where support dropped away completely.

RESOLVED

That the Committee noted and commented on the report.

7. H&F INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Tom Perrigo (Industrial Strategy Officer) and Matthew Coulbeck (Secondary Adviser and 14-25 Development) introduced the item that covered how the Council's Industrial Strategy was being used to improve opportunities for young people in the borough.

Councillor Lucy Richardson asked how the Council was working with businesses to use unspent apprenticeship levy funding and encouraging local businesses to offer inclusive apprenticeships. Tom Perrigo said officers were looking at options to use unspent levy money through a transfer scheme that the London Progression

Collaboration were running. The scheme was designed to give smaller and medium sized businesses access to funding and enable them to create apprenticeship opportunities. Further details could be provided to the Committee as it progressed.

ACTION: Tom Perrigo

Councillor Richardson noted how important it was to create opportunities for young people to get the required English and Maths qualifications if they had failed them in school as it prevented them from accessing many of these opportunities. Officers agreed and said work was being done with West London College and other providers.

Councillor Richardson asked how T Levels were progressing in the borough. Matthew Coulbeck said it was still in the early stages. It was still not clear how T Levels would replace BTEC qualifications, which were strongly embedded in the borough with West London College, William Morris, and other providers. It was important that any change didn't reduce participation.

Councillor Richardson asked if the change would put more pressure on teachers. Matthew Coulbeck said it would.

Nandini Ganesh welcomed the initiative. She noted that her son had been working in an inclusive apprenticeship as an admin assistant in the Economy department and was doing well. She asked officers to ensure the Council was promoting and supporting inclusive internships across a range of organisations and businesses.

Matt Jenkins asked what the Council could do to increase quality work experience opportunities. Matthew Coulbeck said work experience was difficult to manage for schools. It was costly for schools to find placements. The Council had set-up a careers network and careers cluster to help with this, allowing schools to connect with different organisations that could help them.

Councillor Asif Siddique asked how the Council was reaching out to small businesses who were interested in offering work experience but put off by onerous requirements around insurance etc. Matthew Coulbeck said small and medium sized businesses could contact Workzone for advice and support.

Councillor Richardson asked if officers had looked at skill mapping. Tom Perrigo said officers were looking at procuring a career and skills advice tool to help guide people by both assessing their skills and tracking which skills, technologies, and approaches were most in demand.

Councillor Larry Culhane (Cabinet Member for Children and Education) paid tribute to Tom Perrigo, Matthew Coulbeck, and the rest of the team. He said the Council's industrial strategy was at forefront of change, improving opportunities for everyone in the borough. He also noted that the H&F Education Project Team had been highly commended at the LGC Awards for their work on climate education. He thanked Jan Parnell and her team.

8. H&F AFGHAN RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME

Keith Tysoe (Principal Adviser SEND and Inclusion) and Satwinder Saraon (Strategic Lead for Early Years and SEND Transformation) gave an update on the resettlement programme and education offer put in place for 126 Afghan evacuees who arrived in Hammersmith and Fulham in August 2021.

9. SUMMER IN THE CITY PROGRAMME - FOOD PROVISION DURING THE SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

Sarah Bright (Assistant Director, Children’s Commissioning) provided an update on the Summer in the City programme and food provision in the school holidays.

The Committee praised the programme and thanked the officers and partners involved.

10. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The committee noted the following dates of future meetings:

- 31 January 2022
- 28 March 2022

Meeting started: 6.30 pm
Meeting ended: 9.06 pm

Chair

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