

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Children and Education Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Monday 3 July 2023

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Helen Rowbottom (Chair), Daryl Brown, Mercy Umeh, Lucy Richardson, and Aliya Afzal-Khan

Co-opted members: Eleanor Allen (London Diocesan Board for Schools), Nandini Ganesh (Parentsactive Representative) and Nadia Taylor (Parent Governor Representative)

Cabinet Member

Councillor Alex Sanderson (Cabinet Member for Children and Education)

Officers

Jacqui McShannon (Strategic Director of Children's Services)

Amana Gordon (Operational Director, Children and Young People Services)

Phil Tomsett (Head of Family Hubs)

David Abbott (Head of Governance)

Guests

Mike Howard (Local Safeguarding Children Partnership Chair)

Niamh (Youth Mayor)

Albi (Youth Councillor)

Ealaf (Youth Councillor)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

Councillor Lucy Richardson, Eleanor Allen, and Nadia Taylor attended the meeting remotely.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. A YEAR OF YOUTH VOICE

Phil Tomsett (Head of Family Hubs) gave a short introduction to the report which covered some of the highlights and achievements of the young people involved in activities in Hammersmith & Fulham.

Niamh (Acting Youth Mayor), Albi (Youth Councillor), and Ealaf (Youth Councillor) gave a presentation covering some of the highlights of 2022/23 including the launch of the Youth Voice Strategy, developing an inclusive Youth Voice Network, and holding a successful Youth Achievement Awards event in March. They also discussed their future plans, including the SEND strategy co-production, holding a youth-led hackathon in November, developing champions to support their priorities, and improving communication with schools and school councils.

The Chair thanked them for their presentation and asked what new issues had come up when speaking with young people. Niamh said a major issue was that there were a lot of resources available to young people, but they either didn't know services existed or weren't able to access them. The Youth Council wanted to streamline the system and have all the services accessible in one place.

Councillor Aliya Afzal-Khan asked if there were designated contacts in secondary school that Youth Voice reached out to. Ealaf said they were working on the best way to reach out. They wanted to reach the widest possible audience and not all children and young people were in mainstream schooling. She noted they did try to contact every school, and there usually was a designated teacher. They could also send regular updates using Google Classroom. They also worked with other organisations like youth clubs. She noted that hybrid meetings had worked well and reduced barriers to attendance for some people. Albi added that they had a social media team which he co-led, and they were working to improve engagement amongst young people.

Eleanor Allen asked about the group's engagement with the police and if knife crime was still a high priority. Niamh said they thought about safety as a broader topic, but knife crime was still a major concern for many young people across London. They had worked with the Fearless project, a Crimestoppers initiative that enabled young people to report information about crimes anonymously.

Nandini Ganesh thanked Niamh, Albi, and Ealaf for the update and said welcomed how inclusive the Youth Council had become. Councillor Umeh agreed and thanked the young people for their hard work.

The Chair congratulated officers and the Youth Council for a successful year and noted she would be attending the Youth Voice showcase event on the 12th of

December. The event was a showcase of Youth Voice, their borough wide research project findings and resulting recommendations and 'hackathon'. She also offered the Committee's support for their future plans.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee noted and commented on the report.

5. LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

Mike Howard (Independent Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership) presented the first annual report which covered an extended period from its formation on 1 April 2021 to 31 October 2022. He noted that the new sovereign Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) was formed on 1 April 2021 by Hammersmith & Fulham Council. The sovereign partnership meant better collaborative working and focus on local issues, which enabled the best outcomes for children and young people in the borough.

Mike Howard outlined the two 'Adam' and 'David' serious case reviews inherited from the previous Tri-borough arrangement. He noted that the 'David' review was one of the most complicated case reviews he'd been a part of. He highlighted the lessons learned and said it had achieved a number of positive outcomes. Over the past year, other LSCP's had been in touch for support on similar reviews across the country.

The Chair thanked Mike Howard for the report and his commitment to such a challenging and important area of work.

The Chair asked how best practice informed NHS commissioning or funding. Mike Howard said the LSCP did have some influence and they were represented under the new Integrated Care Board (ICB) arrangements. They had been working to ensure the NHS understood what was needed in terms of safeguarding. He said the Partnership would like more involvement but recruiting designates (designated nurses with expertise in child protection) was a problem. He also noted that the 'David' case outcomes had still not been satisfactorily dealt with by central Government, which he attributed to a 'revolving door' of senior civil servants and ministers.

The Chair asked what the Partnership was asking for from the civil service. Mike Howard said the current system did not have enough flexibility to recognise the needs of individuals and in the most serious cases there was not enough capacity to give the treatment necessary. As the cases were relatively rare, they didn't get the priority they deserved.

The Chair noted that the Council had robust data underpinning its services, including predictive analytics and suggested it could be used to bolster the Partnership's case to Government. She offered to take this forward with officers.

ACTION: Councillor Helen Rowbottom

The Chair asked if the 'Child Q' case had links to the Baroness Casey review of the Metropolitan Police. Mike Howard said he felt the Casey review, particularly in relation to public protection and police response was accurate. He said the Partnership had challenged the police to come up with a response to the report and they would be following up on that at the next Board meeting. He added that in the 'Child Q' case, a major factor was that the officers doing the search weren't Safer Schools officers, so they had less understanding of the correct procedures. He also said the school should have provided an appropriate adult to act in the girl's best interest. The police had brought in new guidelines in response to the incident and the local Safer Schools Sergeant and Headteacher had given assurances to the Partnership.

The Chair asked how the Council worked with the Safer Schools team in the borough. Jacqui McShannon said the Council had a strong working relationship with the Safer Schools team. They had forum meetings and there was also a partnership group for safeguarding assurance. Children's Services were also looking at holding a conference in the Autumn looking at equalities, diversity, and inclusion issues.

Amana Gordon said officers were looking at ensuring the whole system provided equity for children in the borough. She acknowledged there was still some discrimination within school, health, and police systems. But she said all partners challenged each other on these topics and they were working hard to ensure children were given the right opportunities and support.

Councillor Daryl Brown noted a case of extreme neglect where the parents thought their behaviour was normal and asked how neglect was defined and how to get the message out to parents. Amana Gordon said social workers tried to avoid terms like neglect, preferring to describe behaviours to avoid misunderstandings. Social workers were very clear with parents about what needed to change and would provide additional support if they thought it was needed.

Councillor Brown asked how the most vulnerable children could be reached. Jacqui McShannon said they worked with schools and partners to ensure they were clear about how to refer concerns to the Initial Consultation Advice Team (ICAT). She said schools in the borough were very alert to children's needs. Amana Gordon added that they also tried to ensure under-fives were exposed to local services like health visitors.

Councillor Aliya Afzal-Khan referred to the case of Awaab Ishak and noted that the borough had a lot of damp and mould in its housing stock and asked if parents could raise concerns on behalf of their children or if referrals could only be made by professionals. Amana Gordon said they were there to support parents. They had a damp and mould group which informed decisions, but the housing department was responsible for housing issues in the borough.

Councillor Afzal-Khan asked how residents could get the housing department to respond. Officers said if they weren't receiving responses, they could go through the complaints procedure.

Mike Howard said there was a housing representative on the Partnership. He said the Awaab Ishak case was unusual in that it wasn't a safeguarding case but was provoked by the coroner writing to the Secretary of State. It was found to have been an institutional failure by housing provider. The Committee asked for more information about how mould and damp housing issues could be escalated and resolved if children were involved.

ACTION: Housing officers

Nandini Ganesh asked if more education was needed to help residents understand the various referrals routes and support structures. Mike Howard said it was not necessarily important for residents to know the specific terms, what mattered was the outcome.

Jacqui McShannon said the disabled children's team had done a lot of work to try to demystify the service. She suggested someone from Amana's team could attend a Parentsactive meeting and discuss how the service worked. She noted they had done similar sessions with schools already.

ACTION: Amana Gordon / Nandini Ganesh

The Chair thanked Mike Howard and officers for their contributions.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee noted and commented on the item.

6. SUMMER IN THE CITY 2023

Amana Gordon (Operational Director, Children and Young People Services) gave an overview of the Summer in the City programme for 2023. The programme aimed to deliver enriching activity and food across the school holidays. The Council recommissioned Let Me Play to coordinate the programme for the next 2 years.

The following points were made about the summer programme:

- It encompassed 5 weeks of provision for school-aged children.
- The programme supported up to 1,200 children per week.
- Provision had been assessed to ensure a diverse range of high-quality provision across the borough.
- All sessions offered enriching activity, physical activity, nutritional education, and food.
- It included provision for care leavers, children who've faced crisis, and children with significant SEND requirements.
- It was free for residents to access.

The Committee thanked officers for their work on the Summer in the City 2023 programme.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee noted and commented on the item.

7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The following dates of future meetings were noted.

- 13 Nov 2023
- 29 Jan 2024
- 25 Mar 2024

At the end of the meeting Councillor Afzal-Khan raised concerns about Fulham Bilingual school being shut down. Councillor Sanderson said the school had to be made safe and as soon as it was ready the school would be reopened. She noted that the Education team had ensured the pupils affected were still getting their education nearby, and she commended them for their work.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 8.42 pm

Chair

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