

# Children and Education Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes

Monday 3 November 2025

## **PRESENT**

**Committee members:** Councillors Helen Rowbottom (Chair), Mercy Umeh, Aliya Afzal-Khan and Liz Collins

**Co-opted members:** Nandini Ganesh (Parentsactive Representative)

**Guest:** Derek Benson (LSCP Scrutineer and Chair of the LSCP Forum)

### **Officers:**

Jacqui McShannon (Executive Director of People)

Sarah Sanderson (Operational Director, Children and Young People Services)

Peter Haylock (Operational Director for Education and SEND, Children's Services)

Anna Carpenter (Head of Safeguarding, CYPS)

Phil Tomsett (Head of Family Hubs)

Cat Miller (Business Development Manager, LSCP)

Debbie Yau (Committee Coordinator)

## **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Alex Sanderson, Daryl Brown and Nadia Talyor (Co-optee).

The Chair took the opportunity to inform the Committee that following a change in proportionality, the Council had approved to allocate a seat to the Green Group which was taken up by Councillor Liz Collins to substitute Councillor Genevieve Nwaogbe.

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **3. MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2025 were agreed as an accurate record.

### **4. H&F LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25**

Derek Benson (LSCP Scrutineer and Chair of the LSCP Forum), who had started in his role in December 2024, introduced the Hammersmith and Fulham (H&F) Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) Annual Report 2024-25, including report areas, new developments, progress of the LSCP priorities, key activities and outcomes from LSCP subgroups, training delivery and impact, partner contributions and strategic direction for 2025-26.

Councillor Mercy Umeh appreciated the great report. She asked about the LSCP's coordination of work among families and children/young people of different cultures.

Derek Benson referred to the publication of a work earlier this year by the National Panel for Safeguarding related to "silent racism" and safeguarding children. He emphasised the importance of local delivery and contributions from partner agencies in undertaking safeguarding work, and considered this should be embedded in everything delivered by a multi-cultural and diverse borough like H&F.

Anna Carpenter (Head of Safeguarding, CYPS) added that voice of young people and children had been central to the Partnership Group and the LSCP Forum. In maintaining a strong relationship through the youth voice service, there was representation from young H&F Foundation, and they had worked hard to ensure the "you said, we did" feedback loop linked with children/young people and Children in Care Council. This had helped the Partnership to understand the challenges of current issues faced by them. They were consulted on key issues for the Partnership and were actively involved in setting the new priorities for the LSCP.

Councillor Aliya Afazi-Khan thanked Mr Benson and officers for the thorough report and their hard work behind the data. She sought information about anti-racist practice and asked if disparities and outcomes were being tracked and reported transparently.

In response, Anna Carpenter noted that the LSCP priorities for 2025-2028 would be underpinned by a cross-cutting focus on anti-racist practice. The metrics would be reported in the next Annual Report.

Nandini Ganesh (Co-optee) expressed appreciation to the brilliant report. She was concerned why education was not a mandatory partner as schools were best placed to judge whether there had been any safeguarding issue.

Councillor Afzal-Khan noted that H&F had already embedded education as a partner and was concerned about their influence on safeguarding priorities and the anticipated measurable impacts.

Derek Benson said it might be a challenge to the Department for Education (DfE) to include education as a statutory partner due to diverse structure of the education sector and provide statutory guidance. Notwithstanding this, it was LSCP's commitment to involving the education sector in its work, for example, the strong voice of education represented by independent schools when setting this year's priorities. He noted H&F colleagues had recognised the importance of this and hence leading the way along with other partnerships.

Anna Carpenter added that education had a strong representation in both LSCP Forum at strategic level and operational Partnership Group. She said she was the Chair of the Partnership Group with representations from schools of early years and voluntary sector delivering a whole range of educational support mechanisms. Anna added that the LSCP had developed an Education subgroup to help ensure H&F understand the core issues faced by different types of education providers and devise support measures to safeguard children on a day-to-day basis. An example of the impact of having education as a key partner was when an education representative raised a serious concern at the Partnership Group about children vaping. This was escalated to the LSCP Forum where members reviewed it from a public health perspective. Subsequently a vaping strategy was put in place to address vaping locally.

Jacqui McShannon (Executive Director of People) referred to the review of Ofsted which had looked at the relationship between education and social care to ensure safeguarding was a priority for all types of education providers. She was confident that there was good communication among partners such that the concerns raised by a school would be discussed and explored by other education partners who shall provide advice as appropriate. Jacqui stressed that the education sector was always seen as a key partner and the communication with all education providers had been very dynamic and on-going.

Sarah Sanderson (Operational Director, Children and Young People Services) referred to the tangible outcomes featured in the LSCP Annual Report. For example, a key safeguarding strategy on attendance had been worked out by engaging education partners who agreed to adopt an early intervention approach. Jacqui McShannon added that on safeguarding concerns like attendance or children missing education, they were tackled by a joint approach through the collaboration of the Children Services and the partnership in order to better protect the children and safeguard their welfare.

In addressing the Chair's concern about attendance, Peter Haylock (Operational Director for Education and SEND, Children's Services) clarified that the attendance rate for the 2024-25 academic year was 93%. Among the remaining 7% of students, 17% of them were persistently absent, i.e. attending less than 90% of classes.

Councillor Afzal-Khan expressed concerns about digital gap and online harm and exploitation and asked how LSCP addressed safeguarding issues arising from them.

Anna Carpenter acknowledged the challenge of online safety, noting it was a country-wide concern requiring on-going efforts. She said strategies were being developed to address online gambling and gaming which could lead to mental and financial issues for children and young people. In addition to focusing on training on online safety, a working group was looking into support mechanisms for young people and their families in relation to online gambling. She noted the need for strategic management of unique online safety themes and the importance of sharing information with partners both locally and nationally. Anna also mentioned the involvement of partners like Catch 22 which provided support around online safety and other safeguarding issues.

On the Chair's question about any valuable dataset that were not accessible to LSCP, Derek Benson noted from different partners in health, economy and policing that they had abundant data that were relevant to the work of the LSCP. He looked forward to generating these data into a meaningful and viable framework for setting safeguarding priorities. Derek was confident this might be put in place at next reporting.

Anna Carpenter added that obtaining local data for some partners had been challenging as it was often regional or national rather than borough specific. However, efforts were being made to localise data. The Chair said that with sophisticated technology in place, both system integration and data segregation could happen with an ask. She was interested to note the list of challenges faced.

The Chair said she understood that the police's tactic of "Stop and Search" was an important part of the youth justice protocol. She noted that unlike the Law Enforcement Team (LET) officers who were more stationary in H&F, the Met Police officers were relatively transient and hence not familiar about the locals.

Jacqui McShannon referred to an on-going pilot work carried out by another borough in partnership with the Met Police, focusing on safeguarding issues rather than just criminal aspects. While there were safeguarding issues arising from young people being stopped and searched at a particular time of nights, considerations were given to addressing this carefully and sensitively with the Met Police to avoid impacting some members of the community disproportionately again. As mentioned earlier, the result of the pan-London Stop and Search Audit done last year might help feed into a London practice in due course.

Sarah Sanderson added that findings and recommendations of a London-wide workshop held the previous week would also provide relevant updates. Cat Miller (Business Development Manager, LSCP) referred to the attendance of the Head of Early Help and Youth Justice and hers at the focus group for the stop and search audit. The stop and search audit findings, involving all 32 London boroughs would provide recommendations in next April. Nevertheless, H&F had already implemented its local action plan based on its own audit findings.

Jacqui McShannon took the opportunity to express her appreciation to Lucy O'Connor who worked on a pilot arrangement by chairing LSCP Forum on top of her day job as the Superintendent Detective at Met Police. As mentioned in the report, Lucy had created a very strong collaborative approach which included all partners

equally. Jacqui also thanked Derek Benson for taking over the arrangement by playing dual roles as the independent scrutineer as well as the Chair of LSCP Forum. Furthermore, she acknowledged the contributions from various partners.

Derek Benson clarified that while he would chair the wider partnership meeting, the actual designated safeguarding partners would chair the core meetings, ensuring compliance and effective use of resources.

## **RESOLVED**

The Committee noted the report.

## **5. UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE REFORMS AND TRANSFORMATION AGENDA**

Sarah Sanderson (Operational Director, Children and Young People Services) provided a brief update, including the context, H&F transformation programme, governance and co-production.

Councillor Aliya Azal-Khan enquired about the difference between the Adolescent Family Help (AFH) Team and existing Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), and the representation of parents, adolescents and residents on the new multi-agency steering group.

Sarah Sanderson explained that the local Families First programme emphasised on the integration of targeted early intervention with statutory social work interventions along a streamlined pathway. The focus was on retaining system strengths and evolving practices, for example via the AFH team incrementally to ensure evidence-based, better outcomes. This was being tested initially with adolescents who had already had experience of the system to assess the effectiveness of having a consistent practitioner in one service area linked to various organisations and teams would lead to better outcomes or not. Sarah noted that H&F's reform programme was centred around four workstreams underpinned by family, workforce and multi-agency voice, including programme lead, voluntary sector colleagues, parents and carers. The family voice was represented on the reforms board and plans were evolving to ensure effective engagement.

Nandini Ganesh (Co-optee) said she sat on the reforms board. She raised concerns about the impact of the reforms on social care practice, noting the worries of parents currently receiving support. While urging for more education to reassure parents about the reforms, Nandini also considered it necessary to improve advocacy in the borough, especially among vulnerable residents.

Sarah Sanderson acknowledged families' anxiety in particular about statutory intervention. The narratives under the Family Help system focused on supporting families and children and making family group decisions through an inclusive family network, while also taking protective action for the children when necessary. Sarah acknowledged the need for further parental advocacy in child protection processes and the planning to develop this capacity.

On the Chair's enquiry about the kinship strategy, Sarah Sanderson noted H&F's current kinship strategy was being reviewed against the national strategy and recommendations on strengthening the already strong kinship offer were expected to be ready by the end of year.

Councillor Afzal-Khan asked about oversight of home education and the challenges of monitoring the education and safeguarding of home-schooled children. She also expressed concern about plans to sustain reforms once the one-off funding was exhausted.

Peter Haylock (Operational Director for Education and SEND, Children's Services) clarified that if a child was home educated the curriculum was the parents' responsibilities. While the council monitored safeguarding and conducted checks, positive changes required central government's action.

On funding, Sarah Sanderson said that the council was committed to building sustainable and deliverable services, with the new Children's Services Prevention Grant expected to continue but the amount allocated moving forward not yet announced and the need to align changes with available resources.

## **RESOLVED**

The Committee noted the report.

## **6. LOCAL OFFER ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25**

Phil Tomsett (Head of Family Hubs) briefed members on the annual report, including the vision of Local Offer (LO), types of LO co-produced, key developments during 2025 and next steps.

The Chair appreciated the holistic and thorough nature of the LO service but she was keen to draw a clear distinction between the LO and the LO award-winning website accessing which did not mean accessing the service. Noting that LO awareness and usage had increased to 47% and 33% in 2025, she sought information on the ways of measurement.

Phil Tomsett responded that LO awareness was one of the questions on the annual survey sent to the SEND families. The usage reflected the number of views from each of the pages measured by website analytics. Noting the self-reported nature of survey data, the Chair expressed concerns about their potential variance.

Councillor Aliya Afzal-Khan asked about actions planned to be taken to increase LO awareness to 60% by March 2026 and expected tangible improvements in terms of Education Health Care Plan (EHCP).

Peter Haylock (Operational Director for Education and SEND, Children's Services) explained that the LO aimed to provide information to prevent the need for an EHCP in some cases. He also outlined various marketing efforts including physical marketing, community outreach etc to increase awareness. While SENCOS in schools and early year providers might serve as a direct route for information dissemination for LO as pointed out by Phil Tomsett, Peter said families might not

visit the LO website via the Family Hub page if they were already receiving the services they needed. Nevertheless, the Chair suggested refining the wording to avoid undermining the holistic nature of the LO, for example, adopting the term “digital front door” used by NHS.

Nandini Ganesh (Co-optee) enquired about the Family Information Service (FIS) and its integration with the Family Hub website. She found it difficult in navigating to the FIS page and suggested improvements.

Phil Tomsett explained that the FIS was accessible under the childcare tab on the Family Hub website. Petre Haylock added that there was also a co-produced page there providing information about mental health services.

On Councillor Mercy Umeh’s question about challenges faced, Phil Tomsett said the key one was the heavy resources required to review and update the pages/ services based on the information provided by the organisations from time to time.

## **RESOLVED**

The Committee noted the report.

## **7. SUMMER IN THE CITY 2025**

Peter Haylock (Operational Director for Education and SEND, Children's Services) noted the Summer in the City 2025 was very successful, with 32 local providers and over 2,400 children participating, including a significant number with SEND and/or on free school meals. He said that the programme featured varied sports and performing arts, with 55% of providers involving children in food preparation. And Family Hubs could be utilised as venues to help reduce the cost of rentals. All families reported reduced financial pressure, and 80% of them noted improvements in their children’s confidence and social development. The programme also addressed accessibility and inclusion for young people with special needs. He also said it was regret that the Annual Community Day had to be cancelled due to bad weather. Peter sent credits to the Commissioning Team and LNP Action for their untiring efforts.

Jacqui McShannon (Executive Director of People) highlighted the positive experience of the programme for young people and children, in particular those with SEND. Based on the previous feedback, activities were distributed across the borough, and this had helped improve accessibility and inclusion.

The Chair expressed appreciation on the amazing engagements and provision over five weeks did bring significant impacts, including childcare costs. Echoing her view, Councillor Aliya Afzal-Khan commended the hard work of the team in managing the partnership and providing a sustainable service. Councillor Mercy Umeh expressed gratitude for the programme, calling it the best thing that had ever happened to education.

## **RESOLVED**

The Committee noted the report.

## 8. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Committee noted the dates of future meetings:

- 27 Jan 2026
- 15 April 2026

Meeting started: 7.03 pm  
Meeting ended: 8.34 pm

**Chair** .....

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