



London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Children and Education Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes

Monday 19 January 2015

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Caroline Needham (Chair), Alan De'Ath, Caroline Ffiske (Vice-Chair), Donald Johnson and Natalia Perez Shepherd

Co-opted members: Dennis Charman (Teacher Representative), Nandini Ganesh (Parentsactive Representative), Philippa O'Driscoll (Westminster Diocesan Education Service Representative) and Nadia Taylor (Parent Governor Representative)

Other Councillors: Councillor Stephen Cowan (Leader of the Council), Sue Fennimore (Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion), Sue Macmillan (Cabinet Member for Children and Education) and Max Schmid (Cabinet Member for Finance)

Officers: Jennifer Bax (Bi-Borough Principal Lead Advisor), Laura Campbell (Committee Co-ordinator), Andrew Christie (Executive Director of Children's Services), Hitesh Jolapara (Bi Borough Director for Finance), Glen McLean (Children's Rights Manager), Dave McNamara (Director of Finance, Children's Services), Steve Miley (Director of Family Services), Glen Peache (Tri borough Assistant Director for Looked After Children and Care Leavers), Sara Scholey (Head Of Service, Looked After Children and Care Leavers Service) and Richard Stanley (Assistant Director School Standards)

36. MINUTES

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Education Policy and Accountability Committee held on 18 November 2014 be confirmed and signed as an accurate record of the proceedings, subject to the amendment to minute number 30, Proposals for the Commissioning of School Meal Services, page 8, fourth paragraph, to replace the word "Parentsactive" with "H&F Mencap".

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

39. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS ANNUAL REPORT

Glen Peache, Tri Borough Assistant Director for Looked after Children and Care Leavers, presented the report highlighting the key areas. It was reported that at the end of March 2014, there were 200 Looked After Children (LAC) which was a decrease from previous years and was different to the national figures where there had been an increase; the decrease in numbers was largely due to the early intervention measures in place in H&F. There had been substantial success this year in the Key Stage 4 results for LAC; there had been a year on year increase in the results.

The Committee and members of the public were invited to ask questions and the following points were raised:

Session held with Care Leavers

The Chair referred to the session held before the meeting at 6pm with some care leavers and Members of the Committee, and she was very impressed with the young people. She noted her commitment to take up many issues that had been discussed in the session, to continue to improve their experience. The Chair referred to the corporate parenting responsibility of the Council and felt it had not quite reached what was wished for young people when leaving care; she was sure more could be done.

One of the co-opted members commented on the young people she had met, noting that they were incredible in the way they spoke about their issues and represented other young people.

Decrease in Numbers of LAC

In response to a question on what prevention measures were in place to help decrease the number of LAC, the Committee was informed that in H&F there had been a strategic approach in terms of early intervention and help. Those on the edge of being in care were worked with and services were provided around the child and family to help prevent any breakdown in the home. How long a child spent in care and how they left the care system was important. Outcomes that were looked for was whether the child could return home and whether they could return to their family. Also important in the outcomes were permanent placements, such as adoptions or living with a member of their extended family through special guardianship orders.

Increase of LAC aged over 16 Years Old

There had been an increase in LAC aged 16 and over which related to a cluster of cohorts; the Council was legally responsible for children in remand, asylum seekers and homeless young people, which resulted in a higher proportion of young people entering care quite late on. In respect of asylum seekers, H&F was part of the PAN London referral system that was run by Croydon. There was a rota so that each London Council was allocated a share of the number of asylum seekers coming into care. Once an asylum seeker became looked after, they received the same provisions as other LAC. However when they turned 18 years old, they would not have a status in the country so would be unable to work and access benefits. The Council would still have its statutory duties for the young person leaving care so it would mean that the Council would provide a wider level of support.

Levels of Satisfaction for LAC

In response to a question on the level of satisfaction for LAC, the Committee was informed that a consultation event had been held where 40 LAC attended to answer questions and give feedback on their experiences. The responses were being collated and put into an action plan. The level of responses were mixed, such as those entering care quite late on would have more difficulty establishing relationships with carers. It was agreed that this action plan would be sent to the Committee for information.

Action: Glen Peache

Educational Outcomes

It was asked how it was known that the high educational aspirations were met and the Committee was told that the virtual school had a management committee which had key plans in place and the educational outcomes would be put forward to the management committee for reviewing.

Adoptions

A member of the public asked how children who had been adopted were evaluated. It was reported that once adopted, the children were under the legal responsibility of their adopters. The children were assessed before they were adopted and other services, such as health and education, would be informed of the adoption so if they had concerns they could refer it back to the Council to look into.

It was asked what percentage of adoptions broke down and it was noted that the majority of placements took place outside of the borough and national statistics were not kept on breakdown of placements. However researchers who had looked into this thought around 5% to 10% of placements broke down. In respect of H&F, Steve Miley reported that there had only been a couple of placements not work out over the past number of years. The likely success of placements was much higher as the Council knew the families involved and it had a good track record in respect of placements. The Committee was informed that the adoption service had been rated as outstanding.

Virtual School

The Committee asked about the virtual school and was told that it oversees the education attainment and assessment for all LAC across the three boroughs. This also involved monitoring 16 to 25 year olds to make sure they were on their way to succeed academically. The resources in respect of the virtual school in H&F were for LAC rather than care leavers however this would be looked at to ensure a greater emphasis for care leavers.

One of the roles of the virtual school was to make sure LAC were placed in a school that was good or outstanding. The virtual school head would negotiate on behalf of the LAC when looking for placements at schools. It was also expected that foster carers would develop relationships with local schools. The virtual school would search for schools at the same time that a placement for a child was looked at, so that the placement and education was done in conjunction with each other.

The virtual school headteacher and teachers were strong advocates for the LAC; the teachers went to the schools to meet the young people and made sure the education plans were detailed.

A lot of work had been done to promote the service of the virtual school with LAC to help them express themselves. The Children's Rights Service worked with the virtual school where there were young people that both services came across, so they got feedback from the young people and integrated their work.

In response to a question on whether pastoral care by schools was considered at when looking at school placements, it was noted that pastoral support was an area the teachers looked at. There was additional resources available through the Pupil Premium grant which was administered by the virtual school headteacher.

Housing

It was asked what was the link between leaving care and social housing, and it was reported that there were good housing allocations in H&F; there were 25 units of accommodation allocated by the housing department which was significantly higher than other local authorities. The number of young people leaving care was 35 and H&F was able to house two thirds of that number. The issue relating to housing was not so much the availability but the help the Council could give young people to manage tenancies.

Corporate Parenting Board

The Committee was informed that the Corporate Parenting Board involved Councillors, officers and young people from the Children in Care Council (CICC), and met quarterly to discuss any issues. It was a good way for young people in care to access the lead member responsible for their care.

Care Leavers

Support was given to care leavers up to the age of 21 years old (this extended to 25 years old if the care leaver was in education). There were a number of measures in place for care leavers.

In respect of an issue raised in the session held with care leavers, where a young person reported she had experienced a large number of different social workers, it was asked why there could be such a large number. It was reported that social care was a complex system and it could be that the young person had worked with a number of social workers before entering care and since coming into care, the needs changed so that a different social worker team was needed to support them. There would be a re-organisation of the social care team, where the relationship between the young person and social worker was key and it would be looked at reducing the number of changes for them.

LAC with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

It was asked how children with SEN were placed in care and it was reported the placement team assessed of the range of carers so that children could be matched according to their needs. Children with SEN were harder to place however H&F had made some successful placements in the last few years for children with specific needs, such as one case where a foster carer was found for a child with high needs and particular adaptations were made to the home to help make this placement possible.

Additional Information in the Report

One of the Committee members referred to the report being an annual update and felt that the Committee should look at the performance of LAC more than once a year, noting that a more detailed analysis should be included in the report; she commented that many metric data was included in the text and the members were not able to compare analysis figures quarter by quarter, such as the performance in the Key Stages, in employment for LAC and in training for example. It was asked that the performance of LAC was looked at more often and a more detailed metric data included. Steve Miley responded that the metric data could be looked at and provided to the Committee outside of the meetings or for the next time the report was considered.

Action: Steve Miley

Promoting Awareness of LAC

The Chair asked what work could be done to help raise awareness of the needs of LAC, such as with professionals in schools, GPs and dentists, for example. The Committee was told that the Local Safeguarding Children Board requested an annual report for LAC and as the board involved multi agency partners, this helped to raise awareness of any issues. There were also designated teachers in the virtual school and a designated doctor and CAMHS officer, who also helped to raise awareness and promote the needs of LAC.

The Chair congratulated the designated nursing team on recently winning an award for their work.

Katriona Ogilvy-Webb, Team Manager, Barnardo's London Service for Sexually Exploited, Missing and Trafficked Children, also attended the meeting to talk about the work she was doing and noted the following:

- she had worked for over 6 years in the borough and a third of the young people she worked with were LAC. The number of LAC had gone down and the service was working less with them because of the prevention measures the Council had put in place.
- the service delivered training at least twice a year to professionals
- as the young people got older, there were not as many professionals available for support and that was a good time for Barnardos to work with them.
- awareness raising was done in schools; the service had visited many schools including all of the all-girls schools, mixed schools, faith schools, special schools, sixth forms and some of the all-boys schools.
- the service worked closely with social workers and had done work with the Children's Rights Service, health professionals, etc.
- two young people from H&F were former service users and had been involved in an interview panel for a new manager, so this helped give opportunities back to the young people by being able to put this exercise on their CV. It was also reported that one young person gave a speech at one of the conferences, which was a good experience for them.
- there would be training held for foster carers this year and training was done for multi-agency partners which professionals could apply to go on

In response to a question on any plans to work with primary schools, Katriona Ogilvy-Webb reported that she had been approached by one primary school and aimed to do a pilot with them, looking at year 6 pupils who were about to go to secondary school and the support needed. She referred to the very vulnerable children who could be groomed because of mobile technology and would want primary schools to get the message across early about the dangers before this becomes apparent.

There was one designated worker from Barnardos working in the borough, where due to budget reductions, their work had been reduced to four days a week. It was asked if the service had capacity due to the reduction of hours, and Katriona Ogilvy-Webb responded that the service ensured it was working efficiently, doing focused work, targeting schools each term. Andrew Christie also noted that Barnardos was specific organisation that was commissioned for work by the Council, but there was also a whole range of professionals in the Council that worked on child sexual exploitation, who monitored the levels of activity and worked with the police. Katriona Ogilvy-Webb also noted that another post had been developed in H&F to work on another area, so there had been a big increase in capacity.

It was asked that examples of case studies be circulated to the Committee to give more information on the work done by Barnardos and this would be looked into.

Action: Andrew Christie and Katriona Ogilvy-Webb

In respect of the consultation event held with the LAC, the Chair asked that the members of the committee be invited to a CICC meeting or an event organised by the young people, so that the members could meet the young people and talk to them about their experiences. This would be looked into.

Action: Glen Peache/Glen McLean

The Chair also referred to a session that she had asked to be organised for Councillors to raise awareness of sexual exploitation and asked that this invitation be extended to the co-opted members of the committee.

Action: Steve Miley

The Chair noted that the issues raised in the session held with the care leavers before the meeting would be taken forward and she thanked the officers and Katriona Ogilvy-Webb for attending and giving their presentations.

40. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Andrew Christie, Executive Director of Children's Services, introduced his report and updated on the following:

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

The Council, along with four other Councils, had been successful in getting another innovative fund bid to work on FGM. Andrew Christie reported that the programme included specific work with health partners, in particular midwifery, where mothers who had experienced FGM would likely to have daughters at risk and work with health colleagues to help identify any people at risk. There were more referrals received from other agencies in particular from schools. In response to a question on what faith community organisations had been in discussions with, Andrew Christie noted that a third sector organisation, called Medina, identified community and faith groups. A briefing note giving information about Medina would be sent to the Committee for information.

Action: Andrew Christie

School Meals Commissioning Contract

The evaluation process had concluded and the bidders had been contacted that day. There were a range of providers, including SEN providers, which included social value in their commissioning proposals.

Bi-Borough Alternative Provision Hub School

In response to a question on the Bi-Borough Alternative Provision Hub School, the Committee was told that work was underway on plans to work with the Tri-Borough Alternative Provision Multi Academy Trust (TBAP MAT) to work together in one place at the Bridge Academy site. TBAP MAT was in consultation with the Education Funding Agency in respect of this proposal.

Changes to Free School Admission Criteria

One of the co-optees expressed concern that there were changes proposed to the admission policy for the West London Free School. It was noted that the school made its own decision in relation to the admission criteria. The local authority gets consulted and was able to comment on the proposals but it was down to the body who was responsible in setting the admission policy, i.e. the school, to make the decisions. One of the members noted that this change would not take effect until 2020.

The Chair commented that the area of admissions was something she would like be looked at, as when looking at different primary schools, in some areas there was a wider choice of schools whereas in others there was less choice. She would like a future meeting to look at mapping the areas where there were wider choices of schools and where the choice was limited for parents. Andrew Christie reported that the school organisation strategy was being drafted, which would include population trends and also parental preferences for schools. One of the co-optees commented that data was collected on parental preference which if robust should be included in the strategy.

Implementation of the Children and Families Act

Work was continued in the implementation of the Act and engagement had taken place with schools and partner organisations. There were a lot of changes following the implementation of the Act and officers were working hard to put services in place and to get feedback from parents. The Chair reported that the Committee would be concentrating on this area at the next meeting and asked everyone to ensure any people affected by the changes were aware of the meeting.

41. CABINET MEMBERS UPDATE

Councillor Macmillan updated the Committee that the Council was giving Council Tax exemptions for foster carers. This was to help to show the Council's appreciation of their work, to help recruit more foster carers and to also help save money where the Council would have to spend in placing some children.

Another half-day session was held with officers and Councillor Macmillan and the Leader to discuss children in care and care leavers, focussing on outcomes for the children. Work was being done with the economic regeneration team on how to help young people get into education and training.

Councillor Macmillan continued to visit schools and had visited the Haven, which was a short break provision. She had also met with Parentsactive that week in particular to discuss SEN arrangements and reported that the local offer website was due to launch.

The Committee was told that the Passenger Transport Working Group continued to meet and monitor the arrangements. Options relating to the service was being considered and there would be a Cabinet report on this soon.

42. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no comments raised under this item.

43. 2015 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Hitesh Jolapara, Bi Borough Director for Finance, gave a presentation on the corporate overview of the revenue budget and Medium Term Finance Strategy (MTFS), which highlighted the MTFS position, the budget assumptions, the Government grant, fees and charges (main exceptions to the standard increase), budget risks/balances/earmarked reserves, 2016/17 and beyond, the Autumn statement and expenditure and resources forecast 2014/15 to 2021/22. The proposed savings overall was £23.8m for 2015/16 and for 216/17 it would be £40.9m (this figure was cumulative savings). The Committee was informed that all charges for children's services had been either frozen or reduced. The Council Tax would be reduced by 1% in 2015/16. It was reported that there were further reductions to be made and by 2019/20 there would have been a reduction in total of around 57%.

Dave McNamara, Director of Finance, Children's Services, then gave a presentation to the Committee on the Children's Services department revenue estimates for 2015/16, highlighting the savings in context, the expenditure, the movement in the budget, the approach to savings, the savings classification, growth items, key risk areas and fees and charges. It was noted that the current controllable budget for Children's Services was £36,650,000 and that this would be reduced to £33,871,000 for 2015/16. There were a number of initiatives that family services had to respond to so additional spending had to be included. It was hoped that placement pressures could be managed, such as if more foster carers were found and more special guardianship orders granted. The department would be looking at subsidising some costs by using some Public Health money.

The Committee was invited to ask questions and the following was discussed:

Reduction in Fuel Charges

In respect of the reduction in fuel charges, it was asked whether there would be significant discounts for transport and fleet fuel costs. It was noted that the fuel costs depended on the nature of the transport contracts but fuel costs were not a significant amount for the Council.

Schools Budgets

A co-optee commented that the schools' budgets over the next few years would pick up the responsibility and costs of areas that the Council would have previously provided. Dave McNamara responded that this was an opportunity to look at what was within the schools grant and the Council had to look where it had to spend money and to look to increase income from schools. It was reported that there was a buy back services from the department and many schools valued the services and continue to pay for the provision.

Staff for Looked After Children (LAC)

In response to a question on the number of LAC staff, it was noted that the same allocation of social worker provision was proposed and there was an opportunity to reduce the number of staff in other areas. Due to the innovative fund on focus on practice, the department was able to bring in extra capacity to free up the work of social workers to be able to do training.

Other Adjustments

One of the members questioned the grant realignment of £219K, referred to in section 7 on page 50 of the report, which noted that it was not a real saving. Hitesh Jolapara responded that this figure related to a technical adjustment to the budget and would give an explanation of the figure to the member following the meeting.

Action: Hitesh Jolapara

Proposals and Efficiencies

In response to a question on the number of proposals and greater efficiencies as mentioned under paragraph 7.5 on page 37 of the report, it was noted that they related to a culmination of plans that have been put in place a number of years ago. Funds had been found in the Public Health budget. It was noted that savings had been re –prioritised and greater savings had been allocated in the transport and technical services sections and also from back office. A Committee member commented that back office staff facilitated front line staff and asked if there had been an analysis so that the removal of back office staff would not affect front line. Steve Miley responded that in some areas, such as family services, there were changes made to the structure so that not as many back office staff were needed. This was also the case in the commissioning services where the future requirements were looked at and the service reshaped.

Children with Disabilities

It was asked what would be the budget pressure relating to children aged 18 plus with disabilities, as mentioned in table 7 on page 38 of the report, and the Committee was informed that this related to children who were looked after and would then continue to be looked after post 18 years old; their level of need would not meet the adult social care requirements and the children's services section would continue to look after them.

Schools Maintenance Budgets

One of the concerns raised at the meeting was that over the next few years the maintenance of school buildings would need addressing which was not referred to in the report. It was reported that previously a maintenance budget for schools was received, but this budget had been squeezed and the deterioration of some buildings continued. There were not sufficient funds to maintain the estate and this needed to be addressed. Officers were lobbying the Government about this issue and the Committee would be kept informed of any outcomes.

Action: Dave McNamara

Fees and Charges

In response to a question on why the fees and charges were not included in the H&F resources, it was noted that the fees and charges were part of the net expenditure. It was agreed that the percentage figures of fees and charges and the gross budget would be sent to Members of the Committee.

Action: Hitesh Jolapara

Commercial Opportunities

It was asked if there were any potential opportunities to generate more income from commercial areas. Councillor Schmid responded that in Children's Services, there was no increase in the charges and there were no commercial activities, whereas in other departments such as environment and transport, there were a lot of ideas to raise resources and these departments were working hard to increase the commercial aspect of generating income. Steve Miley also referred to the adult education service, where officers had helped the service to have online booking which would hope to increase commercial resources.

Areas of Concern

In response to a question on what areas was the Cabinet Member most concerned about, Councillor Macmillan commented that she was not happy about any of the reductions and paid tribute to the officers who had worked very hard on this work. One of the areas she regretted most related to localities; she wished that the Council did not have to take away any funds out of the early help areas.

44. SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2014

Richard Stanley, Assistant Director (School Standards), introduced the report that gave an overview of the results across all the school phases. It was reported that the national performance tables for primary school had now been published that gave details on performance at individual levels. The overall performance at all Key Stages in H&F continued to be above national averages and the percentage of good and outstanding schools was also above national average.

It was noted that the national results for GCSE went down, which was largely due to how changes to the exams were managed. The percentage of H&F GCSE outcomes also went down but compared to the national figures, H&F was not as low. One of the members referred to future changes proposed for the maths GCSE and was aware that some teachers were concerned about the changes. It was reported that the changes to the English GCSE came about mid-way through the academic year, whereas the changes to the maths GCSE have been raised beforehand so schools were able to adjust and meet the demands before the changes took place.

In response to previous school performance reports which included summary tables of results, it was agreed that information would be sent to the Committee giving headline figures for each school against the key indicators.

Action: Richard Stanley

It was asked that a breakdown of progress indicating pupils ethnicity be included in future reports and it was agreed that this would be included.

Action: Richard Stanley

The value added figures were explained, as some schools appeared to achieve over 100%. The Committee was told that the value added measure sought to clarify what children should achieve given a particular starting point. Where progress was above the expected outcomes and above the line of progress, then above 100% would be given. In H&F, out of 35 schools only 5 were below the 100.

One of the co-optees referred to the outcomes for KS2 for reading, noting that the press had reported that one in five children left primary school being unable to read. He understood that the biggest co-hort was level 3 and this level did not indicate being not able to read. He noted it would be interesting to see what an example of level 3 reading looked like so people could see if children were illiterate as the press had reported.

As a Chair of Governors, one of the co-optees found that the results did not reflect what went on in a school; if a school had a disabled child attending who was unable to read then the results of that school dramatically changed.

One member commented that he understood that the government was going to abolish the national curriculum levels and it would be for the schools to assess pupils. It was reported that levels as a form of assessment were disappearing. Schools looked at how they tracked levels and officers were advising schools to build on what they did as it was good practice on tracking progress.

In response to a question relating to the data in the table under paragraph 4.4 of the report, it was noted that the information was from all mainstream schools.

The Chair congratulated the schools in the borough for their excellent results.

45. WORK PROGRAMME

The agenda items scheduled for the next meeting were as follows:

- School Organisation Strategy
- Children and Families Act: Implementation Plan and SEN Arrangements
- Bi-lingual Pupils - covering the issue of bi lingual children being used to interpret for their families and also looking at how bi lingual children were supported from birth
- Progress on delivering the 2 year old offer to families
- Childcare Task Group – progress report

The Chair hoped that the meeting would attract members of the public who were affected by any of the items. She noted that she would like interpreters at the meeting for any parents who attended who used their children to interpret for them.

It was suggested that a future agenda item could be on the issue on how schools tackled the workload of teachers. There had been a letter from the Secretary of State and a report was expected soon on this. The Chair welcomed this as a future agenda item, noting she had heard that some teachers had left the profession due to the workload.

The Chair referred to previous meetings that had considered Ofsted inspection reports, where Headteachers were invited to meetings to discuss their Ofsted reports. She understood the heavy workloads of the Headteachers having to attend those meetings, but noted that she wanted to continue with the visits to the schools. The Chair suggested that outside of the meeting the Committee Members decided amongst themselves who would visit the school and report back to the Committee with any comments. The Committee Co-ordinator would contact the members of the Committee to arrange this.

Action: Laura Campbell

RESOLVED:

That Members of the Committee visit schools that had received an Ofsted inspection to see the school in action, and to report back to the Committee on any comments.

46. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on 10 February 2015.

Meeting started: 7.04 pm
Meeting ended: 9.57 pm

Chair

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