

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
**Children and Education Policy
and Accountability Committee
Minutes**



Monday 13 November 2017

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Caroline Needham (Chair), Alan De'Ath, Elaine Chumnerly and Marcus Ginn

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

Officers:

Dave McNamara (Director for Finance & Resources), Ian Heggs (Director for Education), Bev Sharpe (Assistant Director of Family Services), Anna Carpenter (Safeguarding Review & Quality Assurance Manager), Redouan Maarouf (Head of Service Contact & Assessment), David Abbott (Scrutiny Manager)

Guests:

Jenny Pearce (Chair of the LSCB), Emma Biskupski (LSCB Multi-Agency Training Officer)

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2017 were approved and signed by the Chair.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sue Macmillan, Councillor Caroline Ffiske, Nandini Ganesh, Philippa O'Driscoll, and Matthew Jenkins.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no public questions.

5. DIRECTOR'S UPDATE REPORT

Ian Heggs, Director for Education, and Dave McNamara, Director for Finance and Resources, presented the report which gave an overview of recent developments within the Children's Services department.

Schools Funding

Councillor Alan De'Ath asked, regarding school funding, how the Government defined an 'underfunded' school. Dave McNamara said none of the schools in Hammersmith and Fulham were underfunded. However, the headline figure of an additional 0.5 percent for all schools was misleading as that would not necessarily be spread evenly across the borough and not all schools were guaranteed an increase.

Councillor Alan De'Ath noted that with the changes to pension contributions, national insurance contributions etc. even a small increase in funding would not keep pace with the pressures facing schools. He said it would be useful to see a breakdown of exactly what additional funding each school would receive. Dave McNamara said that information would be released as soon as it was agreed with schools through the School's Forum.

School Performance

Councillor Marcus Ginn noted that selected religious schools such as London Oratory and Sacred Heart consistently achieved impressive results - and asked we could learn from them and apply to lower and mid-ranking schools. Ian Heggs said there were already a range of ways schools shared good practice. There was a strong secondary heads group in the borough and an excellence programme where heads shared practice – particularly around English and maths teaching.

Councillor Ginn asked what the secret of these very successful schools was – why did they consistently out-perform other schools? Ian Heggs said there were a number of factors – the best schools were always over-subscribed which meant they received more funding than schools with spare places, they found it easier to recruit and retain staff. They also had clear expectations for their pupils.

Councillor Alan De'Ath noted that he had worked in a religious school and the shared ethos was a powerful factor – but there were religious schools with poor performance too so it wasn't the defining factor. The real reason for the impressive performance of these school was because they were selective. Their admissions criteria is written in such a way that they don't take as many lower performing pupils as other schools. They shouldn't be compared with other schools.

Ian Heggs commented that where a school's admissions criteria wasn't appropriate the Council did support challenges. Officers had worked with the schools mentioned earlier and they were compliant with the code.

Councillor Alan De'Ath said the key indicator to judge schools should be Progress 8 as it measured progress pupils had made since they started secondary school. He also highlighted the impressive turn-around at Hurlingham Academy, where he was a Governor, and wanted to formally thank Stephen Greenhalgh, the Chair of Governors, and the headteacher, Leon Wilson, for their hard work.

The Chair requested information on schools that required parents to make financial contributions. The Committee had concerns that it was an additional pressure for some parents whose budgets were stretched to the limit. Councillor De'Ath asked for information from officers on what else schools were doing to plug the gaps in their budget – and offer suggestions for how the Council could support them in different ways.

ACTION 1: Dave McNamara

Family Support Service – Managing Director

The Chair asked if the Managing Director of the new Family Support Service had been appointed. Dave McNamara confirmed that Peter Watts was the successful candidate and would be starting on the 1st of March 2018.

Moving On (the disaggregation of the tri-borough arrangements)

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly asked for an update on the Children's Services elements of 'Moving On'. Dave McNamara said staff consultation had begun on the new staffing structures. Some services would remain shared where there were operational advantages in doing so. The new structures would be implemented between 24 March and 2 April. Ian Heggs noted that Mandy Lawson had been appointed as the Assistant Director for SEND for H&F and would officially take up post in January.

Councillor Chumnerly asked if the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) would remain shared across the three boroughs. Emma Biskupski, LSCB Multi-Agency Training Officer, said there was a commitment to keep it as a shared arrangement due to the strengths of cross-border cooperation between many of their partners.

The Chair requested a report on 'Moving On' for the next meeting in January 2018.

ACTION 2: Steve Miley

6. CABINET MEMBER VERBAL UPDATE

Councillor Sue Macmillan was unable to attend the meeting due to illness so there was no update from the Cabinet Member.

Dave McNamara noted the recent launch of the childcare survey which would help inform the Council of parents' requirements for childcare and childcare sufficiency in the borough.

7. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD 2016-17

Jenny Pearce, Chair of the LSCB and Emma Biskupski, LSCB Multi-Agency Training Officer, presented the report. Emma informed the Committee that the LSCB comprised a range of agencies including the local authority, probation services, local prisons, health services, schools, and the police. The whole group meets quarterly and there were also a range of sub-groups that met on an ad hoc basis. These sub-groups include child death overview that examined every child death in the boroughs, expected and unexpected.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly, noting the priorities for 2016-17, asked what the priorities were for 2017-18. Jenny Pearce said they would be domestic violence and peer on peer violence - but that didn't mean they would lose sight of previous areas (e.g. online safety). Councillor Chumnerly asked if the Board had met its priorities for 2016-17. Jenny Pearce said there was still some work to do – she was keen the Board didn't silo the issues facing children. Going forward they would take a more holistic approach as so many issues were cross-cutting. She added that in future the Board would have more engagement with young people when setting priorities.

The Chair noted that the Deputy Youth Mayor had recently released a video speaking about LGBTQ+ issues, including homophobic bullying. She suggested it could be used to inform some of their anti-bullying work.

Councillor Alan De'Ath noted that at a recent scrutiny committee he chaired they looked at hate crime – and the largest proportion of that was homophobic attacks. He suggested it should be more of a focus for the Board. Emma Biskupski said they would look into that area in more detail.

Anna Carpenter, Safeguarding Review & Quality Assurance Manager, said this area was a focus for the Council's Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) lead. Providing a supportive platform that allowed young people to come forward was key. Young gay men particularly found it difficult to be open and honest about what had happened to them.

Nadia Taylor, in reference to the table on page 21 of the agenda, asked how the Council could plan for reductions to child protection plans – did that not entirely depend on external factors? Bev Sharpe responded that historically, the Council had far too many young people remaining on plans when they should have been stepped-down to other support services.

Nadia Taylor asked if the Board could provide the number of children missing in H&F. Bev Sharpe said the number would be relatively low. Missing children were tracked week to week – on average there would be around 10-12 a week. When they were found a 'return home' interview was carried out by social workers to understand why they were missing and the Police were required to do 'safe and welfare' checks. Nadia asked how many remained missing. Bev said no children had been permanently missing in recent years.

Nadia Taylor asked for more information on the Alan Wood review. Emma Biskupski said the review was commissioned to look at the functions of the LSCB. One of the key proposals was to have a national panel to look at cases with national impact.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly commented there was still confusion over the single point of access (SPA) and information about it needed to be shared more widely (with all social landlords for example). Emma Biskupski said she would take that away and challenge how it was being promoted.

Councillor Alan De'Ath felt there needed to be a strategy for retaining social workers and improve the continuity of workers on cases. Bev Sharpe said this was a key area

for Children's Services. The department worked hard to recruit good people and retain them and had set up a new work-stream on this (including housing costs). There was already a TeachFirst-like programme to bring people into the profession and the department had a competitive progression system. They had also invested in practice assistants – officers that would do admin tasks for social workers to allow them to focus more direct time on working with families.

Vic Daniels, in reference to page 67 of the agenda, asked why the 2016-17 underspend for Hammersmith & Fulham appeared to be so high. Emma Biskupski said she would look into this and provide more information outside the meeting.

The Chair asked what work had been done to tackle forced marriage. Emma Biskupski said the Board had done a lot of awareness-raising around harmful cultural practices including forced marriage and female genital mutilation. She noted that the number of referrals on these issues in the borough remained low. Anna Carpenter added that Children's Services had a child protection advisor who led on cultural issues - offering specific advice and signposting to resources. Though there were low numbers of these issues reported in the borough it was likely that more remained hidden.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly asked how the Council could make social landlords aware of the issues discussed above. Emma Biskupski said they did a lot of training with housing staff and there were housing representatives on partnership groups. Councillor Chumnerly said the Board needed to get this information out to all social landlords – not just the larger, more engaged providers.

Jenny Pearce said she had been impressed by the commitment and engagement from a range of partners in the borough. Though she did have some concerns that child protection was seen as the job of the LSCB alone. More work needed to be done to break down that attitude and engage with the private sector (hotels, taxis, bouncers etc.).

Vic Daniels asked how many of the LSCB members were there as parent representatives. Emma Biskupski said there were lay members (or community members) but none were specifically representing parents. The Chair suggested having an experienced foster parent on the Board – they would be familiar with many of the issues facing young people and could provide real value and insight. Jenny Pearce said the Board was undertaking a review of lay-member recruitment and they would consider that proposal.

RESOLVED

1. The Committee recommend that the LSCB retained lay members and consider appointing an experienced foster carer to represent parents.
2. The Committee also recommended that the LSCB explored ways to widen its recruitment of lay members through improved community engagement.

8. ANNUAL CHILD PROTECTION REPORT 2016-2017

Anna Carpenter, Safeguarding Review & Quality Assurance Manager, presented the report that highlighted the significant responsibilities which the local authority had with regards to ensuring the protection of children, and how it discharged them.

Vic Daniels asked what the Council was doing to identify, control, and eradicate gang activity in the borough. Bev Sharpe said the Council was looking at this issue more strategically. Many young offenders were known to social services and had child protection plans. This year the Youth Offending Service was being brought back in house to H&F which would allow the Council to provide more effective intervention services. The Council was also working closely with schools, the police, and other partners across London on gangs and knife crime. Councillor Elaine Chumnerly felt it was important to tap into existing community networks to help tackle gangs, especially considering the Council's limited resources. The Chair requested a report on the Council's gangs and knife crime prevention work.

Anna Carpenter said the key to tackling gang crime over the long term was preventative work to stop young people joining gangs in the first place. She had found relationship-based outreach work to be most effective. Bev Sharpe added that a pilot 'adolescent at risk' approach would start up in March where one key worker would be assigned to each at-risk young person and they would be given far more personalised support.

Councillor Alan De'Ath said it was also important to address the lack of aspiration and opportunity. For some, education was not seen as a route to success. He wanted to see the best schools in the borough reserve places for young people who had to undertake 'managed moves'. The current system meant schools with the most spare places (often the worse performing) ended up taking pupils who had been moved out of other schools for bad behaviour. This created a cycle of poor outcomes for both the pupil and the school. He also suggested some pupils in expensive alternative provision could be offered places in boarding schools to give them access to quality education in a different environment.

Bev Sharpe agreed that lack of aspiration was a major issue. Now that the education service was becoming sovereign again officers were looking at a new education offer to tackle some of these issues. Officers were also looking at replicating the 'virtual school' model used for looked after children – which, as the Chair noted, had been very successful in improving aspiration and outcomes – for the new adolescent service.

Councillor Elaine Chumnerly asked what the general advice to parents was in terms of support and referrals. Anna Carpenter said one borough put a piece in the local free paper (e.g. 'if you're worried about your child get in touch'). She felt it was important to think creatively – perhaps using targeted social media, Facebook adverts etc. Councillor Chumnerly said there was a lot more outreach to do – the message had to get out to Children's Centres, parents networks, and beyond.

The Chair commented that the Council should think about the tone of its communications with parents. If a child didn't turn up to school we should be saying,

'you're probably as worried as we are - we can help' rather than laying down the law and pushing them away. Parents are worried about being blamed when we should be encouraging them to engage. Bev Sharpe said the Early Help service did offer support to parents in those circumstances.

The Chair asked if the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation panel (MASE) would remain a shared service after Moving On. Anna Carpenter said it would as there were so many cross-border issues and strong information sharing gave the best chance to affect change. The Chair asked how many live cases there were currently. Anna responded that H&F had the most, likely due to differences in demographics between the boroughs, but there was a dedicated Child Sexual Exploitation lead to deal with these issues.

RESOLVED

That the Committee reviewed and commented upon the report.

9. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee requested the following items:

- Home education
- Moving On – to be considered in January 2018
- Gangs and knife crime prevention including our current gangs policy, an overview of current work, and what's left to do – for March 2018
- Medical plans – a briefing note to be circulated outside of the meeting
- Skills for young people – March 2018

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for 29 January 2017.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.20 pm

Chair

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