

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 20 February 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Tuesday, 20 February 2018 at 7.00 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Debono (Chair), Wayne (Vice-Chair), Ismail and Ngongo

Co-opted Members: James Stephenson, Secondary Parent Governor
 Erol Baduna, Primary Parent Governor
 Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese

Also present: **Councillor:** Caluori

Councillor Theresa Debono in the Chair

284 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Spall and Gallagher.

285 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A2)

None.

286 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A3)

None.

287 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. A4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2018 be agreed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

288 CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)

The Chair reported that the Fair Futures Commission had published its recommendations and these would be considered by the Council at its meeting of 22 February 2018.

The Chair reported that the visit to the CAIS Council had been interesting and the views of those young people would be considered as part of the Vulnerable Adolescents scrutiny review.

289 ITEMS FOR CALL IN (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. A6)

None.

EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE AND QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. B1)

Councillor Caluori, Executive Member for Children, Schools and Families, provided a verbal update on his work. It was noted that the council would respond to the recommendations of the Fair Futures Commission in due course.

A public meeting about the Catholic Diocese's proposals to form a multi-academy trust would be held on 6 March 2018. The meeting would include representation from local schools, school governing bodies, the Catholic Diocese, the National Union of Teachers, and others. In response, Mary Clement reported that she had raised this matter with the Diocese, and had been advised that decisions to convert catholic schools to academies were being considered on a borough by borough basis.

A member of the public asked why Children's Services were so female-carer centred and why they seemed to have an aversion to the concept of male carers and including them in their work. In response, it was advised that social workers were supposed to work with the whole family and this should include both male and female carers. Whilst the majority of child carers tended to be female, male and female carers should be considered equally by council services. The Executive Member could not comment on individual cases, however advised that complaints may be raised on such matters and dealt with through the council's procedures.

A member of the public asked why, despite receiving training, Children's Services were ignoring and denying male domestic violence; and why Children's Services had declined an offer of advanced training on this matter. In response, it was advised that the council acknowledged male victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence training courses were held three times a year and this included reference to male domestic violence victims.

A member of the public asked why accuracy in note taking, reports and fact checking was not a priority for Children's Services, why challenges on the accuracy of note taking were dismissed, what audits were carried out to ensure work was carried out in accordance with Health and Care Professions Council guidelines, and what actions were taken following any audits. In response, it was advised that accuracy was considered very important, audits were regularly carried out, these resulted in action plans, and action plans were monitored by the Children's Services management team. Children's Services also held 'practice weeks' where senior officers carried out audits, observations, and worked alongside practitioners. This provided opportunities for management to scrutinise record keeping and other matters, if required.

A member of the public asked why social workers had not completed parts of welfare reports under Section 7 of the Children Act 1989, what could be done to ensure that officers were completing their work, and what processes were in place to ensure that this did not continue to happen? In response, it was advised that social workers and legal officers had received training on Section 7 reports and social worker reports were regularly quality assessed. This training would be repeated twice a year. The Executive Member could not comment on individual cases.

A member of the public asked why their experiences of Islington's children's services did not meet the standards that Cllr Caluori described. In response, it was acknowledged that things did not always go well in all cases, however local agencies sought to learn from such cases. It was commented that a recent Ofsted inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers found Islington's services to be good with outstanding features.

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A member of the public asked what was the current situation of local school reserves earmarked for schools and special needs pupils. In response, it was advised that the total figure of school reserves was £8,270,211. Decisions on reserve expenditure were made by schools, in accordance with school priorities.

A member of the public asked if Islington academies were taking their surpluses with them after academisation. In response, it was advised that The Bridge had carried over a deficit, and final accounts had not yet been received for other schools converting to academies.

291 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)

A member of the public asked if parents were choosing to electively home educate in Islington. In response, officers advised that some parents chose to home educate in Islington, and the council carried out visits to these families.

The Committee requested a briefing note on home education and supplementary schooling to a future meeting, to include information on how safeguarding is achieved in these settings.

A member of the public asked if the parents of summer born children were permitted to defer school entry. In response, it was advised that this was permitted following a recent change in national policy. Around 30 children a year took up the offer of deferred entry.

292 VULNERABLE ADOLESCENTS SCRUTINY REVIEW - WITNESS EVIDENCE (ITEM NO. B2)

Evidence from Detective Superintendent Treena Fleming on the work of the Islington Safeguarding Children Board Exploitation Sub-Group

The Committee noted that DS Fleming had given apologies for absence, and that a briefing note on the work of the Exploitation Sub-Group would be circulated in due course.

Notes of Scrutiny Visit

A member highlighted the concerns of the CAIS Council about the quality of some semi-independent accommodation for looked after young people. Officers advised that some of the specific issues highlighted by young people had been followed up after the meeting. It was also advised that the council had recently re-commissioned accommodation for looked after young people, and this was expected to result in improvements in the quality of accommodation.

The Committee noted that the CAIS Council had reported positive experiences of working with council services. In particular, the young people were grateful for the council tax discount offered to care leavers.

A member commented on the importance of communicating effectively with young people, and reiterated the CAIS Council's requests for an app to be developed and for young people to be able to contact their social worker through instant messaging.

Briefing note on Contextual Safeguarding

Finola Culbert introduced the briefing note which explained the 'contextual safeguarding' approach. It was commented that contextual safeguarding methods may be beneficial to vulnerable adolescents facing safeguarding risks outside of the family home.

A member asked how adopting contextual safeguarding approaches would change the day to day business of children's services. In response, it was advised that the current statutory safeguarding framework was focused on risks in the family home. This was not always relevant to the safeguarding risks faced by adolescents; a contextual safeguarding approach would result in local agencies widening their focus when assessing risks to young people, and targeting interventions outside of the family home. It was commented that contextual safeguarding was being piloted in Hackney, and Islington officers were keen to learn from this pilot.

Officers commented that the Islington Fair Futures Commission had raised concerns which may be best addressed through a contextual safeguarding approach. For example, the Commission had highlighted concerns about the safety of young people on public transport, and concerns about young people feeling unsafe in their communities.

**293 VULNERABLE ADOLESCENTS SCRUTINY REVIEW - DRAFT
RECOMMENDATIONS (ITEM NO. B3)**

The Committee reviewed the draft recommendations set out in the agenda.

The Committee was supportive of the draft recommendations, however asked that they be reviewed by Children's Services officers, with the aim of making the recommendations more granular and specific.

Members commented that they were impressed with the range of services available to support vulnerable adolescents and asked that this be reflected in the final report.

It was agreed that the recommendations would be reviewed by officers and circulated to members for comment in advance of the next meeting.

**294 UPDATE ON WORK UNDERTAKEN TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS AND OTHER
SERVICE PROVIDERS TO IDENTIFY, PREVENT AND ADDRESS ANY ISSUES OF
BULLYING (ITEM NO. B4)**

Finola Culbert, Director of Safeguarding and Family Support, introduced the report which summarised the council's work to support schools in preventing bullying.

It was noted that Islington Council was unusual in having an anti-bullying coordinator, however this helped to support schools and helped to raise the profile of anti-bullying work in the borough.

The Committee expressed concern at the number of children identifying themselves as victims of bullying. 15% of pupils interviewed as part of the young people's health and wellbeing survey had been bullied in the past 12 months. In response, officers advised that they did not have comparable data from other boroughs, and bullying could take a range of forms, from name-calling to physical violence. Officers suggested that there would always be a level of bullying in schools, and it was important to consider the interventions and support available to young people alongside the number of young people being bullied.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

**295 CHILDREN'S SERVICES RESPONSE TO PREVENT - FEBRUARY 2018 UPDATE
(ITEM NO. B5)**

Jeff Cole, Head of School Improvement (Secondary), introduced the report which summarised how Children's Services had responded to the Prevent Duty.

Officers advised that a Prevent Strategy Group meeting would be held on 1st March 2018 to review the Prevent Action Plan. It was also commented that a new Prevent Education Officer was appointed in September 2017.

The Committee noted that over 23 different supplementary schools and madrasas had recently attended Prevent training.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the report be noted;
- (ii) That a further update be received in one year's time.

296 REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B6)

Noted.

MEETING CLOSED AT 8.10 pm

Chair