

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

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

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

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

Councillor Theresa Debono in the Chair

297 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Ismail, Spall and Gallagher.

The Chair also gave apologies from Councillor Caluroi, the Executive Member for Children, Schools and Families.

298 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A3)

Councillor Hamitouche substituted for Councillor Gallagher.

299 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A2)

None.

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

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2018 be agreed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

301 CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)

The Chair noted that it was the last meeting of the municipal year and thanked Committee members for their work.

It was noted that the parent governor representatives' terms of office were coming to an end and the council would shortly re-open nominations for the roles. The Chair thanked James Stephenson and Erol Baduna for their contribution to the Committee.

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

None.

303 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)

A member of the public highlighted that several Islington schools were not displaying Energy Performance Certificates, as required by legislation. It was queried if the

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council would be taking up this matter with schools, as organisations not complying with the legislation could be fined £500. Officers advised that this would be taken up with head teachers and an update would be provided to a future meeting.

304 ISLINGTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD: ANNUAL REPORT (ITEM NO. B1)

Alan Caton, Independent Chair of the Islington Safeguarding Children Board, presented the report summarising the work of the Board.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Safeguarding Children Board was subject to an Ofsted review in 2017 which found the Board's practices to be good. In particular, it was highlighted that the Board had a clear vision and purpose and multi-agency working was well developed. Ofsted had made four recommendations and the Board was working to implement them.
- Safeguarding children continued to be a challenging and complex area of work. The Board was concerned that the demand for services was increasing while the resources available to local agencies were decreasing.
- Alan Caton was confident that local agencies were committed to identifying and supporting vulnerable children.
- The Safeguarding Children Board was pleased with the progress made on Prevent and tackling radicalisation.
- Alan Caton commented on the potential safeguarding risks associated with private fostering arrangements. Children's Services was only aware of a few cases in Islington, and further work was needed to raise awareness among professionals of the need to report such arrangements to the local authority. There was a concern that young people in private fostering arrangements, particularly those from overseas, were invisible to local agencies.
- The Safeguarding Children Board had expressed concerns about the oversight of elective home education. It was emphasised that the majority of parents who choose to home-school their children did so for entirely legitimate reasons, however there was a concern that a lack of oversight by local agencies was creating unnecessary safeguarding risks. The council only had limited powers to monitor families that home-educate their children. Alan Caton had written to the Children's Minister about these issues.
- Alan Caton commented on the importance of listening to the voices of children and young people, and summarised the Safeguarding Children Board's work to engage with young people.
- The Safeguarding Children Board had ongoing concerns about serious youth violence and gang activity and had commissioned a review of knife crime by Public Health. A number of recommendations had been made as a result.
- The Safeguarding Children Board was keen to ensure that learning from case reviews was embedded into the practices of local agencies. The Committee noted the judicial review relating to accommodating children in police custody, and considered the challenges of finding appropriate accommodation for young people charged with serious offences. It was explained that this was a nationwide issue.
- Alan Caton summarised the key messages for partner agencies, as set out in the report. It was suggested that the committee should be particularly aware of how services listen to the voices of young people; and should question demographic factors when reviewing services for young people.
- The Committee congratulated the Islington Safeguarding Children Board on producing a clear and accessible report which explained the borough's child safeguarding issues.

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- The Committee queried the Board's risk register as detailed in the report, asking if the risks were current or if they had been addressed. In response, it was advised that the risk register was a live document which was discussed at every Board meeting. The register had been updated since the annual report had been produced. Current risks included matters related to serious youth violence, children waiting more than a year to see perpetrators charged, and the lack of safeguarding training received by staff at Pentonville Prison. It was noted that the CPS would be attending the next Board meeting to discuss the charging of perpetrators, and training sessions were being arranged for Pentonville staff. This would involve up to 300 staff attending training sessions in a school hall.
- The Committee asked if the Police or CPS was responsible for delays to perpetrators being charged. In response, it was advised that greater joint working between the agencies would result in better outcomes. It was hoped that this could be facilitated through the Safeguarding Children Board.
- The Committee queried the number of young people being educated at home, and how the council supported these families. Officers advised that the council was aware of around 130 children being educated at home, however this number fluctuated regularly. The council employed a support officer who regularly visited families engaging with the local authority, however there was a risk that not all young people being educated at home were known to the local authority. There was no legal requirement for parents to engage with the council on this issue; it was explained that home education is a parental right and the council did not have powers to carry out inspections. However, the council could direct home-educated children to attend school if there were significant concerns about the curriculum or safeguarding.
- A member of the public commented that he was pleased that the council was working to address violence against women and girls, however highlighted research by the National Education Union and UK Feminista into the concerning levels of sexism in Britain's schools. It was queried if any work was underway to address sexism in Islington's schools. In response, it was advised that such work was carried out by the council's Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator. A report on the anti-bullying work in schools was presented to the previous meeting.
- The Committee noted that the safeguarding children framework was due to change following the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Government guidance on revised safeguarding arrangements was expected to be published in May 2018; the Police, local authority and CCG would be able to determine the safeguarding arrangements in their local area. It was commented that some areas intended to carry out safeguarding activities over their NHS Sustainability and Transformation Partnership footprint, which combined several local authority areas. The new arrangements would come into force from September 2019. Officers commented that Islington's safeguarding activity had been rated good and it was not intended to significantly revise Islington's safeguarding arrangements.

RESOLVED:

That the Islington Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report for 2016/17 be noted.

305

QUARTERLY REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE (Q3 2017/18) **(ITEM NO. B2)**

Mark Taylor, Director of Learning and Schools; Finola Culbert, Director of Safeguarding and Family Support; Jeff Cole, Head of School Improvement (Secondary) and Anthony Doudle, Head of School Improvement (Primary) presented

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the report which summarised the performance of children's services in Quarter 3 2017/18.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Committee expressed concern that Black Caribbean pupils and White British pupils eligible for free school meals were not achieving the same level of progress as their peers. Officers shared the committee's concerns and attributed this disparity to a class issue. Although it was hoped that measures to support all young people would result in improved attainment across all demographic groups, it was a concern that young people from certain backgrounds were not catching up with their peers.
- Officers explained that some schools experienced these issues more acutely than others and this was being addressed through the Community of Schools. Schools where there was a large gap in progress and attainment for certain groups were being paired with schools where this was not a significant issue. This was intended to encourage discussion around how to best support Black Caribbean and White Working Class pupils, and it was hoped that this would help schools in developing best-practice approaches.
- Officers commented that by Year 6 the attainment gap between children eligible for free school meals and their peers was significant. Officers advised that schools intended to form a strategic partnership and appoint an officer to carry out a detailed review of this topic, however this would depend on the availability of school resources. Officers commented that Black Caribbean and White Working Class attainment was an equalities issue, rather than a purely educational concern.
- The Committee suggested that the council and schools needed to engage further with community groups holding after school activities to ensure that Black Caribbean and White Working Class pupils received targeted wrap-around support.
- A member commented that funding from the Schools Forum for supplementary education activities may reduce. The Committee expressed concern that this may have a negative impact on young people. In response, officers advised that the council and head teachers valued supplementary education, however the financial pressures on schools and local authorities were so significant that they were struggling to carry out their statutory functions. The council and local schools would review if community groups providing supplementary education could be supported in other ways which did not involve a direct financial contribution. Officers hoped that this would result in more strategic join up between schools and supplementary education providers.
- It was suggested that supplementary schools and community groups may be able to use school premises in the evenings and at weekends. Members commented that this would provide a safe environment for young people.
- A member highlighted that the Committee regularly received information about the challenges faced by working class pupils, which included trauma in childhood and low aspirations. It was commented that these young people faced multiple challenges which reinforced the inequalities in wider society. The Committee emphasised the importance of supporting young people from working class backgrounds.
- The Committee considered the work underway to develop a 'cultural entitlement' programme, which would provide all young people with 11 cultural experiences by Year 11. Officers commented that there were a number of free cultural activities which were open to all and it was important to ensure that young people had access to these.

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- Officers commented that young people who had experienced trauma tended to struggle in high-pressured test scenarios, even if they were otherwise high-performing pupils.
- The Committee noted that absence from school had a significant impact on attainment and it was crucial that schools engaged effectively with parents on this issue.
- A member asked officers if they considered that schools were using pupil premium funding effectively to reduce inequalities, if the council could do more to support schools in spending this funding appropriately, or if schools did not receive adequate funding. In response, officers advised that some schools used the funding effectively, however the role of the council was to monitor compliance, rather than outcomes. It was known that the funding was used for a wide spectrum of activities, and Islington did engage with schools on its use more than some other authorities, however the council did not have powers to direct schools on how the funding should be spent. Schools were required to publish how they used pupil premium funding.
- A member commented on the importance of engaging with parents. It was suggested that clear communication was needed on the responsibilities of schools, the responsibilities of parents, and aspirations.
- A member of the public queried if Islington was affected by national challenges to recruit and retain teachers. In response, officers commented that Islington was successful in recruiting newly qualified teachers, however there was a retention issue when teachers reached an age when they wanted to start a family. Housing in Islington and the surrounding areas was not affordable for those on middle incomes and this resulted in many experienced teachers moving out of London.
- The council held borough-wide training sessions for teachers to ensure that all teaching staff were aware of local issues.

The Committee thanked officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED:

That Children's Services performance in Quarter 3 2017/18 be noted.

306 VULNERABLE ADOLESCENTS SCRUTINY REVIEW - DRAFT REPORT (ITEM NO. B3)

The Committee considered the draft report of the Vulnerable Adolescents scrutiny review.

Officers commented on the importance of supporting those affected by domestic abuse, highlighting that around 60% of the most vulnerable adolescents had been affected by domestic abuse.

The Committee agreed that Recommendation 6 be amended to emphasise that young people affected by domestic violence and abuse should receive support at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Committee delegated authority to the Chair to approve minor and consequential amendments, prior to the report being submitted to the Executive.

The Committee thanked officers for supporting the review.

RESOLVED:

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- (i) That the report of the Vulnerable Adolescents scrutiny review be agreed, subject to amendments to emphasise that young people affected by domestic violence and abuse should receive support at the earliest possible opportunity;
- (ii) That authority be delegated to the Chair to approve minor and consequential amendments, prior to the report being submitted to the Executive.

307 VOTE OF THANKS

Members of the Committee thanked the Chair for her service to the Committee over the past year. The Committee also thanked officers and all of those who had contributed to the work of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That a vote of thanks be accorded to the Chair for the services rendered by her to the Committee during the current municipal year

MEETING CLOSED AT 8:40pm

Chair