

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 16 July 2018

At the previous meeting the Committee had expressed its intention for the review to cover both exclusion and persistent absence, however following discussion with senior officers, the Chair had suggested that the review focus on exclusion matters only.

The Committee was advised that both exclusion and persistent absence were sizable topics, and it would not be feasible to review the two distinct issues in sufficient detail within the time available. It was thought that a review of exclusion could have a greater impact than a review of persistent absence, as the Committee could scrutinise the processes and actions of schools and support services; whereas persistent absence was often the result of complex factors which it was more difficult for the Committee to directly influence. It was suggested that the Committee could review attendance data on a regular basis through the quarterly performance update.

The Committee agreed the scrutiny initiation document, subject to two additions to the scope of the review.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Initiation Document be approved, subject to the following additions to the scope of the review:

- If pupils eligible for free school meals or with special educational needs are more likely to be excluded than the remainder of the cohort
- If there are any common factors among pupils who are excluded and those who are persistently absent.

(b) Introductory Presentation

Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services, presented to the Committee on the legal framework for exclusions, exclusion processes, and data on the number of exclusions locally and nationally, characteristics of excluded pupils, and the reasons for exclusion.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The most frequent reason for either fixed term or permanent exclusion was 'persistent disruptive behaviour'. All schools had a disruptive behaviour policy, however if some schools had an unusually high number of exclusions, it was suggested that the policy was either ineffective or not being implemented successfully.
- Boys were more likely to be excluded than girls, however, Islington had a much higher proportion of excluded girls (44%) than the England average (23%).
- A disproportionately high number of black minority ethnic pupils had been excluded in Islington, compared to the overall cohort. The Committee expressed concern at this, and was keen to explore why this may be, and how this could be addressed.
- It was advised that Statutory Guidance would be circulated to members of the Committee. Officers summarised key aspects of the guidance, including that schools should avoid excluding pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). It was noted that Islington excluded fewer pupils with an EHCP compared to the England average.
- Schools were able to exclude pupils for incidents that happened outside of school.

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 16 July 2018

- Islington Council maintained records of the reasons why pupils had been excluded. The 'other' category was reserved for pupils who had been excluded for a weapon-related incident.
- Officers were concerned by national reports that some schools made use of unofficial or illegal exclusions; however, the council was not aware of Islington schools engaging in this practice. It was advised that any report of an illegal exclusion would be taken very seriously.
- Although there was no formal mechanism for local authorities to challenge individual decisions to exclude, the Council did engage with head teachers on exclusion issues and challenge their practices where appropriate.
- There was a presumption that a local authority representative would be invited to exclusion meetings of the Board of Governors at maintained schools. The council had good working relationships with local academies and was invited to relevant exclusion meetings at academies also.
- If excluding for 'persistent disruptive behaviour', decision-makers would typically be presented with a behaviour log and details of interventions attempted.
- If a child was permanently excluded, then the council had a duty to find them a place, either in another mainstream school or the pupil referral unit. Excluded pupils were usually referred to the New River College pupil referral unit. The council aimed to find a place for excluded pupils within six days.
- The Committee queried if the council had a mechanism to ensure that school behaviour policies were robust and being implemented successfully. In response, it was advised that the council did not audit school behaviour policies in this manner. Policies were reviewed by the council annually, however this was to check that they complied with legislative requirements, rather than assessing their effectiveness.
- Pupils referred to the pupil referral unit received full time education, 25 hours a week.
- The Committee reviewed exclusions data up for 2015/16, which was the most recent available. It was advised that data for 2016/17 would be available shortly.
- Officers advised Islington had a particularly high rate of primary exclusion, and a higher than average rate of secondary exclusion. It was commented that secondary exclusions had increased nationwide in recent years, however local data suggested that Islington's secondary fixed period exclusion rate had continued to increase between 2015/16 and 2017/18.
- A member highlighted that the increase in exclusions in Islington had coincided with the changes to education introduced by the coalition government in the early 2010s. Although officers noted that this was accurate, it was emphasised that Islington had a higher exclusion rate than other boroughs.
- In response to a question, it was advised that 75% of pupils in Islington primary schools progressed to secondary schools in the borough.
- Officers advised that the significant increase in excluded girls in 2015/16 was partially attributable to a specific cohort of young women on the cusp of gang involvement.
- It was commented that sometimes exclusions would temporarily increase following the appointment of a new head teacher, as the head teacher would want to enforce discipline.
- Officers highlighted that there was no particular trend in academies, faith schools, or community schools being more prone to exclusion than other types of school.
- The Committee reviewed anonymised exclusions data and queried if the Committee could "name and shame" those schools which exclude most frequently. In response, officers advised that school-specific exclusions data

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 16 July 2018

was not published in the public domain, and agreement from schools would be needed to publish the data. Whilst there was a need to hold schools to account on their exclusion practices, it was suggested that a collaborative approach would be more likely to achieve positive outcomes.

- Although exclusion often had a detrimental impact on young people and their families, it was commented that parents of other children sometimes welcomed exclusion, as it minimised disruption and other issues impacting on their children.
- The law requires that pupils serving a fixed term exclusion must stay at home. The Committee noted that this was particularly problematic for working parents. It was suggested that the law was intended to make exclusion inconvenient for parents, so that they would seek to address their child's behaviour. The Committee discussed if this was a fair approach and expressed concern at the effect this could have on families.
- If a young person had received fixed period exclusions for more than 45 days in a single school year then they would be automatically permanently excluded. This was a legal requirement. Although it was not common for a young person to be permanently excluded for this reason, officers advised that there had been two recent cases in Islington.

The Committee thanked officers for their attendance.

21 POST-16 EDUCATION EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING REVIEW 2016/17 - 12 MONTH REPORT BACK (ITEM NO. B2)

Andrea Stark, Director of Employment, Skills and Culture, introduced the report which summarised progress on implementing the agreed recommendations of the Post-16 Education, Employment and Training review.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Officers thanked the committee for their recommendations, which had helped the service to develop a more strategic approach. It was commented that the integration of the Progress team into the iWork service had resulted in better business engagement with the team, and this was having a positive people on young people engaging with the service.
- The Committee's recommendations were being considered alongside the recommendations of the Fair Futures Commission, which also sought to improve careers advice and progression support for young people.
- It was reported that an increased number of schools were welcoming the support of the Progress team.
- Work was underway to provide greater employability support to young people in alternative provision. This involved partnership work between the council, New River College, and the BIG Alliance. This work was in its early stages, however officers reported that there was a huge amount of goodwill on all sides and the partners were enthusiastic about this work. It was commented that industry-led careers education was limited in mainstream education settings, so providing this support to vulnerable pupils in alternative provision was considered to be an innovative approach.
- It was commented that Islington now had one of the highest rates of young people in apprenticeships in London, however further work was needed to ensure that young people could access apprenticeships in all employment sectors. It was highlighted that Islington had many innovative tech businesses that young people would be keen to work for, but did not know how to access these industries.

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 16 July 2018

- Officers reported that the most challenging recommendation to implement had been engaging with school governors on careers education matters. It was advised that the council would re-engage with governors on this issue in autumn 2018.
- It was reported that the Progress and iWork team now had more accurate information on how taking up work could affect a young person's family's benefits entitlement, and bespoke advice was provided to parents as required.
- A member asked how a significant increase in cultural entitlement and work experience would impact on the school curriculum. In response, it was advised that the council wanted schools to include careers education as a core part of their curriculum from primary school onwards.
- A member expressed concern that some young people became NEET after choosing an inappropriate college course, and asked what was being done to support young people in choosing appropriate pathways. In response, it was advised that the council was developing an emphasis on the breadth of pathways available to young people in the local area. A local labour market analysis was currently underway, and the results would be shared with schools, parents and young people to help them better understand the employment opportunities locally and how to access them.
- Officers had identified young people with high rates of absence or who had not sat their GCSEs, and would be engaging with them over the summer to ensure that they had identified an appropriate pathway as soon as possible.
- In response to a question, it was advised that many local businesses did want to engage with the council and offer work experience or apprenticeships, however these opportunities were generally offered by corporate services firms with significant CSR (corporate social responsibility) budgets. There was a need to engage with all sectors in the local economy.
- A member noted that the scope of the Committee's review of Post-16 Education, Employment and Training did not include evidence from school sixth forms and colleges - the main providers of post-16 education – in respect of their role in developing pathways for young people and supporting them into employment. It was suggested that this may be an area suitable for further scrutiny in future. Following the meeting, it was advised that officers were due to commission a Local Skills Strategy that would assess the role of sixth forms and colleges and may be a useful reference for future work, should the Committee decide to revisit the topic.

The Committee thanked officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED:

That the 12-month update to the scrutiny review be noted.

22 QUARTERLY REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE (Q4 2017/18) (ITEM NO. B3)

Carmel Littleton, Corporate Director of Children, Employment and Skills, introduced the report which summarised Children's Services performance at the 2017/18 year end.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Committee was pleased that re-referrals to children's social care were gradually decreasing.
- The number of children subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time had slightly increased, however officers advised that this was

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 16 July 2018

due to a small number of cases. The most common reason for issuing a child protection plan was due to domestic abuse or violence.

- A virtual college had been established to supplement the work of the virtual school, and would support care leavers aged 18 to 25.
- Officers emphasised the challenges of recruiting suitable foster carers for vulnerable young people aged 15 and over. It was noted that these young people exhibited challenging behaviours and may be gang affiliated. Work was underway with foster carers and those interested in becoming foster carers to inform them of trauma informed practices. It was hoped that this would result in more stable placements for teenagers in foster care.
- There had been a reduction in first time entrants to the youth offending service, and a reduction in young people in custody. Re-offending had not decreased as hoped; this was due to a small cohort of young people entrenched in offending.
- The Committee welcomed the significant reduction in the number of young people in Alternative Provision.

RESOLVED:

That Children's Services performance at Quarter 4 2017/18 be noted.

23 REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B4)

A member suggested that the Committee could have a greater focus on universal services, and a particular focus on educational attainment. The Committee requested that preliminary exam results for GCSEs and KS2 SATs be reported to the Committee as part of the quarterly performance report when they become available. The Committee wished to review trends in attainment and any significant or unexpected results.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.00 pm

Chair