

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 18 October 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Tuesday, 18 October 2016 at 7.30 pm.

Present: Councillors: Debono (Chair), Ismail (Vice-Chair), Diner, Gill and Wayne

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

166 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nick Ward.

167 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A2)

None.

168 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A3)

None.

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

The Committee agreed to revise the sixteenth bullet point under minute 161 as follows:

- The Committee expressed their concern for the outcomes of pupils with mental health issues and other vulnerabilities such as drug dependency and special educational needs, commenting that these could be significant barriers to their engagement with employment, education and training. It was queried how many young people NEET had mental health issues, and if there was a follow up when they moved into the 19-24 age group to confirm if they continued to have mental health issues. Officers did not have figures available at the meeting however advised that this would be investigated. It was commented that mental health issues were recorded as health issues.
- It was queried how many young people NEET had an Education, Health and Care Plan. It was advised that this would be investigated as figures were not available at the meeting, however it was thought that few had EHCPs.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them, subject to the following amendment to the sixteenth bullet point under minute 161:

- The Committee expressed their concern for the outcomes of pupils with mental health issues and other vulnerabilities such as drug dependency and

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special educational needs, commenting that these could be significant barriers to their engagement with employment, education and training. It was queried how many young people NEET had mental health issues, and if there was a follow up when they moved into the 19-24 age group to confirm if they continued to have mental health issues. Officers did not have figures available at the meeting however advised that this would be investigated. It was commented that mental health issues were recorded as health issues.

- It was queried how many young people NEET had an Education, Health and Care Plan. It was advised that this would be investigated as figures were not available at the meeting, however it was thought that few had EHCPs.

170 **CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)**

The Chair suggested that the Committee should have a greater role in reviewing the Council's corporate parenting function and in particular the work of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Councillors Caluori, Gill, and Ismail declared an interest as members of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Members considered that scrutinising the work of the Board would be prudent and requested that an annual report from the Corporate Parenting Board be added to the Committee's work programme.

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

None.

172 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)**

None.

173 **POST-16 EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING: WITNESS EVIDENCE (ITEM NO. B1)**

(a) Evidence from Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School

Paul McIntyre, Assistant Headteacher of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School, made a presentation to the Committee on the school's work to prepare its students for further education, employment and training.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The school worked to raise the aspirations and develop the character of its pupils. The school sought to provide pupils with a robust set of transferrable skills they could apply to any vocation.
- Preparing pupils for further education, employment and training began in Year 7, with raising awareness of different career paths and helping pupils to identify their own skills. Work on employability skills began in Year 9, and pupils carried out work-related activities in Year 11.
- The school considered that it was very fortunate to be based in London, as its pupils had many opportunities open to them.

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- Although schools had limited resources to invest in extra-curricular activities, the school had introduced the Skills Programme to develop pupils' personal, learning and thinking skills. This was a fortnightly programme for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 and focused on areas such as communication and presentation skills, leadership, group dynamics, interview role-play, and resilience.
- Information, advice and guidance on employment was also provided through assemblies, with speakers, sometimes former pupils, attending to speak on different career paths. The school considered it important to provide pupils with positive role models.
- Every pupil in Years 10 and 11 had a conversation with the careers team about their aspirations. Information, advice and guidance was also provided through the pastoral team. The school wanted all staff to feel that they were contributing to the pupils' futures.
- The school had developed long-term relationships with businesses to support the provision of information, advice and guidance and work-related learning. The school had a particularly positive relationship with Hogan Lovells law firm; the firm supported a mentoring programme, school trips to their offices were held, and each head of year met the firm to discuss their pupils' needs.
- In response to a question, it was confirmed that the school followed up the destinations of its alumni and these were displayed on a board in the school.
- The school valued the council's support for apprenticeships, commenting that pupils and parents were sometimes sceptical of non-academic pathways. The school wanted vocational pathways to be held in the same regard as academic pathways.
- The format of work experience had changed in recent years. The school no longer arranged one or two week placements in business; instead the school wanted to provide pupils with a real insight into organisations. The school arranged tours to businesses, provided pupils with the opportunity to interview employees, and arranged structured opportunities for pupils to experience day-to-day work in some of its partner organisations. Pupils were encouraged to arrange traditional work experience themselves over a weekend or holiday.
- The school supported pupils in drafting and regularly reviewing their CVs. Feedback on CVs was given by the school's business partners at 'Present Yourself Day'.
- A large proportion of the school's pupils went on to attend City and Islington College. The college fed back that the school's pupils were well equipped for further education, but the school was keen to further develop its information, advice and guidance offer. In particular, the school was aware that some ethnic minority pupils lacked confidence in the workplace and was working to improve this.
- The Committee asked how schools could improve the quality of their information, advice and guidance. Whilst Mr McIntyre could not speak for other schools, it was commented that effective relationships with businesses were important, and those businesses had to understand the needs of pupils to ensure that they were providing the highest quality support. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson worked with its business partners to carefully plan sessions for pupils; whereas some organisations wanted to engage but did not want to tailor their sessions to pupils' needs. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School was careful to select the right people to carry out the right sessions for their pupils.
- Members queried the attitude of parents to the school's information, advice and guidance offer. It was advised that the school emphasised to parents that it was essential for pupils to have a range of activities on their CV, however some parents did not value creative activities. The school advised parents that providing a range of opportunities to pupils was as important as attaining high grades.

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- Parents were invited to a dinner with their children following the completion of their work with Hogan Lovells. Pupils had to give a speech about what they had learned, and it was thought that a parent seeing their child in a business setting was particularly a powerful way to raise family aspirations.

The Committee thanked Mr McIntyre for his attendance.

(b) Evidence from Central Foundation School

Lesley Thain, Head of Employer Engagement at Central Foundation Boys' School, made a presentation to the Committee on the school's Central Futures programme, which helped students prepare for further education, employment and training.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Central Foundation School had seen a drop in the number of its pupils progressing to university; however it was thought that this was due to increasing awareness of employer-based training and apprenticeships. 24% of Central Foundation pupils progressed into apprenticeships.
- The school worked with a number of high-quality business partners and considered that it was fortunate to be located in Islington for this reason. Partner organisations included the law firm Slaughter and May, the University of Bristol, and Pret A Manger. There was a two-way relationship between the school and its business partners. For example, Euromonitor provided workshops for the school's economics students, and after being particularly impressed with its students, was reviewing its recruitment practices to target school leavers as well as university graduates.
- Although the majority of information, advice and guidance was provided by the Central Futures team, all teachers were expected to engage pupils in conversations about their future.
- The provision of information, advice and guidance started early – with some pupils attending a Year 6 summer school. This continued throughout the school; workshops were held in Key Stage 4 to audit pupils' skills, help pupils to select appropriate courses, network with employers and support applications to 6th form. In Key Stage 5 the school held a mock university applications process, and Slaughter and May helped pupils with their UCAS personal statements.
- The school kept in contact with former pupils, and was willing to provide former pupils with information, advice and guidance after they had left the school.
- Information on work experience, training programmes and other opportunities was circulated to pupils in a monthly newsletter and through a dedicated Central Futures website. Guidance for parents was also available from the website.
- Central Foundation School tracked pupils' progress, and this data was shared with anyone providing guidance to pupils. The school wanted to be able to track pupils for four years after leaving school, however acknowledged this was difficult.
- The Committee queried the feedback the school had received on its approach to careers education. In response, it was noted that the school would sometimes be contacted if a pupil's destination was not appropriate. Such instances were rare but the school sought to learn from these.
- The Committee noted that some pupils struggled in the transition from school to work and queried if anything further could be done to better prepare pupils for employment. In response, it was advised that some pupils and their

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families needed advice on how employment or an apprenticeship could affect their benefits eligibility; the school was aware of instances where families had unexpectedly lost benefits income as a result of their child's employment, one family had subsequently become homeless.

- Part-time work in the evenings and weekends provided valuable opportunities and experience to young people, however some pupils found it difficult to find part-time work due to the amount of competition in the local job market. The school was trying to provide its pupils with employment opportunities within the school and these were taken up enthusiastically.
- The school had worked with teachers and parents to raise the profile of apprenticeships. Some teachers saw university as the best route for all pupils and needed informing of the quality and range of alternatives available.
- Members expressed their concern that pupils were encouraged to apply for apprenticeships and employment without the full knowledge of how this would affect their family's benefits. It was also a concern that young people progressing to university accrued huge amounts of debt, even if they dropped out during their first year. It was thought that such financial barriers could be a barrier to education, employment and training.
- A member of the public queried if pupils were provided with information about gap years or opportunities to study abroad. In response, it was advised that the school had recently hosted a conference for Dutch universities teaching English-speaking courses.

The Committee thanked Ms Thain for her attendance.

(c) Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance in Islington's secondary schools (Evidence from Alison Bennett, Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Specialist)

Alison Bennett, Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Specialist, introduced the report and made a presentation to the Committee setting out the legal framework, national policy, and local context of careers education.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Council worked with schools to develop their careers provision. Up until 2012 this was resourced through the Connexions service.
- Schools previously had a statutory responsibility to provide careers education and information in accordance with regulated resources and to arrange work experience, however these duties were removed in 2012. Schools were now only responsible for providing guidance to pupils, however this was without the support of statutory guidance or government funding. Although some schools were very good at planning their careers education, Ofsted had found that 75% of schools nationally did not provide the right level of support to their pupils. The Council sought to support schools in this area.
- Statutory guidance for schools was updated annually, and it was thought that such regular changes hampered schools' ability to effectively plan careers education.
- Schools were required to provide pupils with information on the full range of education and training options, including apprenticeships and opportunities at other schools and colleges.
- The Council advised schools on how to access professional careers advice. There were a number of resources available; some were free, others had to be paid for. The Council maintained an online portal of resources for schools.

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- The Council provided training in-school and arranged other sessions for careers leads and tutors across the borough. A termly newsletter and termly networking meeting was also held. These reviewed the work carried out in schools nationwide to identify best practice.
- The Council was aware that a disproportionately high proportion of alternative provision and New River College pupils became NEET and was working to develop a gold standard of careers education for those pupils.
- A member queried officers' experiences of different schools. In response, it was advised that all schools were different but faced similar challenges. All schools were seeking to provide the highest quality careers education with very limited resources.
- It was queried how officers supported lower performing schools. It was advised that such schools often either did not have a full understanding of statutory duties and guidance, were unaware of the resources available, were unaware of what Ofsted expected of schools, or were unaware of best practice approaches. Officers worked to advise on these areas and help schools to develop their own approaches.
- It was commented that head teachers and governors were ultimately responsible for how their school delivered careers education, however the council did engage with the senior leadership teams of all schools in the borough on careers issues.
- Following a question from a member of the public, it was advised that all schools were supposed to have a governor with responsibility for careers education, however not all governing bodies had appointed someone to this role.

The Committee thanked Alison Bennett for her attendance.

(d) Responses to questions raised by the Committee at September 2016 meeting

Holly Toft, Head of Play, Youth and Post-16, introduced the report and made a presentation to the Committee in response to questions raised at the previous meeting.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Committee considered demographic and other information related to the 99 young people aged 16-19 NEET at December 2015. It was noted that 58 of those had cycled in and out of education, employment and training. This high level of churn of engaging and disengaging was considered to be typical of young people facing complex challenges.
- It was known that none of the cohort had attended special schools and no Islington secondary school had more than three pupils classified as NEET.
- Members queried the reasons why young people may disengage from further education. It was advised that there were a number of reasons why pupils may drop out; some pupils faced complex personal issues; sometimes pupils chose courses which were not suitable for them. It was the responsibility of schools to offer guidance to pupils to help them make the right choices.
- It was commented that the breakdown of NEET data was helpful. It was understandable that the six NEET pupils who previously had statements of special educational need might face additional barriers to the employment market.
- Whilst the Committee had considered the work of Islington schools in detail; it was remarked that only around a quarter of young people NEET had attended mainstream Islington schools.

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- It was queried if the six young people in custody or subject to YOS orders had all attended New River College. Officers did not have the data available at the meeting and indicated that this could be investigated, however commented that all young people in alternative provision would also be on the roll at New River College. Officers expected that the majority of young people unavailable to the labour market due to criminality would not have been New River College pupils and were more likely to have previously attended alternative provision. Following the Committee's previous review of alternative provision, members of the Committee were well aware of the issues faced by alternative provision pupils.
- It was noted that the 11 young people not available to the labour market due to illness may have mental health issues; however data was not broken down by type of illness. Members highlighted the high prevalence of mental health issues in Islington and the additional barriers to education, employment and training that those with mental health issues would face.
- Concern was also expressed at the effect of drug use on employment prospects and engagement with education.
- Only 18 of the 99 young people NEET in December 2015 were in learning by August 2016. It was thought that this was indicative of the complex challenges faced by the NEET cohort. It was commented that NEET pupils with chaotic lives may struggle with routine and structured education.
- Following a query by a member of the public, it was confirmed that some of the 99 NEET young people faced several of the issues listed. Officers advised that very small numbers of the cohort were classified as NEET for other reasons, such as being educated at home or attending hospital school.
- The Committee noted that the highest proportion of young people NEET were males from white ethnic backgrounds. Members queried the reasons for this and how these young people could be best supported.

The Committee thanked Holly Toft for her attendance.

174 **SEND REFORMS AND IMPACT - UPDATE (ITEM NO. B2)**

Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services, introduced the report which set out progress made on implementing the reforms to how young people with special educational needs and disabilities are supported.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The last time officers presented to the Committee it was suggested that the service should focus on a smaller number of priorities. It was reported that officers had since reduced the number of strategic priorities from 30 to 7.
- Islington was making good progress in converting statements of special educational need into Education, Health and Care Plans, and was progressing ahead of other inner-London boroughs.
- A team of six parent consultants had been established to help with engagement and co-production.
- Feedback on the EHCP assessment process had been mapped and was generally positive.
- A discussion was had on outcomes. Although academic achievement was very important, qualitative or 'soft' outcomes were also important, particularly to parents. Increased confidence, wellbeing, and engagement in social activities were considered to be very positive outcomes. The service had developed a RAG-rated framework to map the progress of young people

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against qualitative outcomes. The Committee considered progress against these outcomes and welcomed the depth of data available.

- It was hoped to appoint a special school representative to the Youth Council in the next election.
- It was queried how outcomes were measured for primary-school aged children. In response, it was commented that outcomes for that age group were often focused around speech and language development which were 'health' outcomes. The Committee thought that RAG-rating progress was a very clear way of measuring performance.
- Members queried if any negative feedback had been received on the EHCP assessment process or the implementation of EHCPs by schools, and if there had been any increase in dissatisfaction since the EHCP process had been introduced. In response, it was advised that complaints had decreased over the past two years. All comments were analysed and there were no obvious factors which required addressing, however it was acknowledged that sometimes groups of families would unite around particular issues. Officers understood the importance of assessments being carried out appropriately, effectively, and in a timely manner.
- It was queried if Islington had enough special school spaces, noting that another borough only had 30 special school spaces for around 100 children diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder. Officers advised that Islington had three good special schools and The Bridge School was expanding. It was also advised that Islington began assessments for children with autistic spectrum disorder at the point of identification, rather than at formal diagnosis. This ensured that support was delivered faster.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made to date be noted and a further update be received in 12 months' time.

175

QUARTERLY REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE (Q1) (ITEM NO. B3)

Carmel Littleton, Corporate Director of Children's Services, and Finola Culbert, Director of Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Services, introduced the report which assessed the performance of the Children's Services directorate from April to June 2016.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- This was the first quarterly performance report to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee. Such performance reports were previously considered by the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee. The Committee had the opportunity to revise the performance measures received to attain a broader understanding of Children's Services' performance.
- It was noted that 95% of families with children under-5 being registered at a Children's Centre was the Council's best ever performance. Officers would be working to increase this figure further.
- Although the national issues with the government's Troubled Families programme were recognised, it was positive that 30 families had achieved successful outcomes through Islington's Stronger Families programme.
- The percentage of persistently absent primary school children was better than target at 9.5%, however the service was working to reduce this.
- The quarter 2 report would include GCSE results for 2015/16, and it was indicated that these were above the national average.

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- The vast majority of Islington school leavers moved into sustained education, employment or training, at 96.7%.
- The recruitment of new foster carers was a challenge across north London, partially due to housing sizes and the availability of spare bedrooms.
- Although the number of children reported to be missing from care had increased, it was thought that this was due to the introduction of a new centralised reporting system. This system recorded each instance a child went missing from care, and some young people may have gone missing on multiple occasions within the quarter. A CSE and Missing Children Co-Ordinator had been in post for nine months and senior officers were confident that high-risk children were being supported appropriately. It was advised that the children who went missing from care were predominantly 16 and 17 year olds who had entered the care system as teenagers.
- It was explained that homeless 16 and 17 year olds were required to be placed into care since the Southwark judgement of 2009. These children were very vulnerable; some were affiliated to gangs or had experienced sexual exploitation. These children were particularly difficult to engage with and some would drift in and out of the family home.
- A member queried why Islington's Stronger Families programme was considered a success, whilst the Troubled Families programme nationally had been regarded as a failure. In response, it was advised that the Council had made a sustained effort to support families and the Stronger Families programme was only a single element of the range of support services provided by the Council. For example, families on the Stronger Families programme would also be supported by early help services. This was not the case in many other local authority areas, which may have different priorities. However, officers did acknowledge that there were issues with the performance measures used by the Troubled Families programme.
- The Committee reviewed the performance measures set out in the report. It was agreed that the performance measures be amended to include a greater oversight of the Council's safeguarding activity and work to support looked after children.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That progress against the council's corporate priorities and targets in the first quarter of 2016/17 be noted;
- (2) That the performance measures reported to the Committee be amended to include a greater oversight of the Council's safeguarding activity and work to support looked after children.

176 EXECUTIVE MEMBER QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. B4)

Councillor Joe Caluori, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families, answered questions related to his portfolio.

Ernestas Jegorovas asked if the Council was committed to the government's School Census, and if advice was provided to schools and parents on which datasets were mandatory and which were not. In response, it was advised that the census was statutory and officers encouraged schools to complete it thoroughly. Cllr Caluori acknowledged that the government had revised the census to include questions on pupils' nationality. It was the responsibility of schools to communicate information about the census to parents.

177 **REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B5)**

The Committee considered if further evidence was required to support the review of Post-16 Education, Employment and Training. The Committee requested to receive further evidence from local schools, in order to gain a more rounded view of the range of careers education being provided. Members also queried which Islington schools the young people NEET had attended.

It was noted that members had already requested that an annual report from the Corporate Parenting Board be added to the Committee's work programme.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.30 pm

Chair