

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 21 November 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Monday, 21 November 2016 at 7.30 pm.

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

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

Councillor Theresa Debono in the Chair

178 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)

Apologies for lateness were received from Mary Clement.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Joe Caluori, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families; and Carmel Littleton, the Corporate Director of Children's Services.

179 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A2)

None.

180 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A3)

None.

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

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

182 CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)

The Chair asked if members would prefer to start Committee meetings at 7pm. The Committee indicated that this would be preferential and agreed to commence meetings at 7pm from the next meeting.

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

None.

184 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)

A member of the public queried the impact of North Bridge House School, an independent fee-paying school, being located in Canonbury. In particular, the extent of its scholarships, bursaries, and community outreach work was queried.

The Director of Learning and Schools commented that there had been no notable impact on admissions to Islington's secondary schools. Councillor Nick Wayne, a Canonbury ward councillor, commented that the school did carry out outreach work in Canonbury and had a positive partnership with the Rose Bowl Youth Centre and other Canonbury stakeholders.

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

a) Employability Skills Support for Young People

Lorraine Blyth, Post-16 Participation Manager, and Hamish Mackay, Youth Employment and Apprenticeships Manager, introduced the report and made a presentation on the Council's employability support offer.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Committee noted the work of the Progress Team and the implementation of the Progress Pledge; which was developed with young people and clearly set out the support young people could expect to receive.
- The Progress Team offered independent and impartial advice on a one-to-one basis and could make referrals to other support services as necessary. It was important for information, advice and guidance to be provided in a clear and accessible way. Young people particularly valued support in applying for work experience and volunteering opportunities.
- The Committee noted three case studies of young people who had received support from the Progress Team. It was emphasised that those seeking employment support often had complex issues and faced additional barriers to employment. Support from the Progress Team was tailored to their specific needs and ambitions.
- The Committee noted the targeted employment support for 18 to 24 year olds, including the Council's work in providing apprenticeships, bespoke traineeships, and supporting the provision of apprenticeships in the local economy. The Council provided one-to-one support to young people and ongoing support once they were in employment.
- The Council led the Islington Youth Employment Network, which arranged opportunities for local employers to meet young people NEET through speed-networking sessions and TED style talks. It was noted that the last such event was attended by 60 young people and 17 employers; within a fortnight 14 of those young people were in employment.
- It was explained that Saturday jobs traditionally helped young people to develop employability skills and transition into employment, however there was significant competition in the local labour market and such opportunities were increasingly rare for young people.
- The Council's apprenticeship schemes were targeted at borough residents aged 16-24, however anyone was able to apply. It was hoped that these opportunities would support young people, as well as the long term unemployed, those with disabilities which were a barrier to employment, care leavers, and others.

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- The application period for the Council's repairs apprenticeship posts had been aligned to the academic year. It was intended for apprenticeships to be considered on par with academic pathways.
- The Committee noted two case studies of 18 to 24 year olds who had accessed targeted employment support services and had successfully applied for apprenticeships.
- The iWork service had supported 104 people into apprenticeships in 2015/16; it was noted that this included adults who had been out of work for six months or more.
- It was commented that the information provided did not allow for effective scrutiny of the service. It was noted that statistical information had been provided to a previous meeting, however further information was requested on: the percentage of successful apprenticeship placements (i.e. after receiving support from the Council, how many people unexpectedly left before the end of their apprenticeship, and how many were offered a job); data on the penetration rate for targeted employment support, and how the service knew it was reaching all of the young people who needed support; performance against key performance indicators and targets; and a list of the apprenticeship providers the Council worked with.
- Officers advised that it was difficult to provide statistics on the number of people aged 18 – 25 who would benefit from targeted employment support, as the claimant count was not an accurate measure of how many unemployed young people there were in the borough. People in this age group were hard to reach and tended not to seek support.
- The performance of the service was monitored through external reviews and officers regularly reviewed the progress of young people after 13, 26, and 52 weeks. It was commented that it was sometimes difficult to contact people after a significant period of time, as their contact details may change, or they may feel that they no longer need to engage with employment services.
- The Committee commented on the need to have high aspirations for young people NEET. Whilst officers agreed that the young people they worked with had many talents and it was hoped that they would go on to be very successful, it was recognised that many young people NEET had skills gaps and complex needs which they needed to overcome first.
- Officers commented on the wide range of apprenticeship opportunities available locally and within the Council: these included tradesperson roles; office based roles in Legal, Finance and HR; ICT roles in Digital Services; and creative roles with organisations such as Sadler's Wells Theatre.
- Although there were a number of apprenticeship opportunities available, officers commented that some young people were not yet ready to apply for apprenticeships and more informal traineeships would be useful as a starting point to help young people into employment.
- The Council was trying new methods of engaging hard to reach young people. Organisations had recently been commissioned to carry out peer to peer outreach work on a pilot basis; the results of this had not yet been received.
- The Council's apprentices were employed at the London Living Wage, which was much higher than the apprentice minimum wage of £3.40 an hour. The London Living Wage was also paid by organisations in the Council's supply chain; however the Council did promote some apprenticeship opportunities to young people that did not pay this rate. It was commented that paying the London Living Wage to apprentices was difficult for some local businesses if their more senior staff were only paid the London Living Wage or lower. However, the Council was selective of which opportunities it promoted to young people, and only supported young people into opportunities with clear progression pathways. In general the Council did not support young people in

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taking up apprenticeships which paid below the equivalent minimum wage rate.

- A member of the public queried the success of the Saturday Jobs Campaign, noting that only 15 jobs had been offered in 2015/16. In response it was advised that the service was intentionally providing intensive support to a low number of young people, however it was hoped to slightly increase this number in future.
- It was confirmed that the youth employment support offer was regularly reviewed in consultation with young people. Feedback from young people was often focused on requests for financial support to purchase specific equipment or study materials.

The Committee thanked Lorraine Blyth and Hamish Mackay for their attendance.

b) Vocational Pathways

Cherrylynn Jaffier, Post-16 Progression Advisor, made a presentation and introduced the report on support for young people seeking vocational pathways.

The following pain points were noted in the discussion:

- Ms Jaffier worked with young people in Year 11 who were seeking vocational pathways.
- Young people from all secondary schools in the borough were offered one to one support, however schools utilised the Progress service differently, depending on the level of support already provided by the school. Group sessions were also held from time to time.
- It was commented that it was important to challenge young people's misconceptions, as sometimes they had unrealistic expectations of how they could progress in vocational pathways.
- Young people were provided with a personalised action plan to help them apply for vocational opportunities. This advised the young people what to do and when. Support with interview preparation was also available.
- The Progress Advisor role included monitoring the progression of pupils after they had left school. Advisors also maintained an up-to-date list of the apprenticeships, vocational college courses, and traineeships available locally.
- It was thought that providing specialist vocational pathway support helped pupils to make balanced choices about their future, and informed them how best to access their chosen career path.
- It was advised that the majority of pupils seeking vocational pathways progressed to college, however some moved into apprenticeships or work-based training.
- In response to a question, it was advised that it was not possible to provide a demographic breakdown of the young people accessing support for vocational pathways, as this data was not routinely recorded. However, further demographic information, as well as an update on young people's progress, would be known towards the end of January when the results of the annual activity survey were available.
- It was advised that, in general, male pupils tended to enquire about construction or trade based pathways, and young females were interested in hair, beauty or childcare. However, it was commented that young people's chosen pathways could change after learning about the reality of jobs in certain industries.

- The Committee commented that the work of a Progression Advisor seemed very varied and queried if anything would enhance the role or make it easier. In response, it was advised that an increasing number of young people were interested in creative media, graphic design, web design, and similar pathways; however few opportunities in these fields were available. It was also commented that some young people needed sustained intensive support and at times the caseload was so great that it was not possible to support every young person in this way.
- The Committee commented on the additional barriers faced by pupils with special educational needs and those who did not speak English as a first language. It was queried how such pupils could be best supported. In response it was explained that pupils who did not speak sufficient English were advised to improve their language skills, as they would otherwise almost certainly struggle in further education or employment.
- A member of the public asked for an update on the 34 students who were in the process of having their destinations confirmed, as set out at paragraph 3.4 of the report. In response, it was advised that these had progressed to various destinations and none were currently NEET.

The Committee thanked Cherrylynn Jaffier for her attendance.

186 THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES RESPONSE TO PREVENT (ITEM NO. B2)

Finola Culbert, Director of Targeted and Specialist Children's Services, introduced the report on how Children's Services had responded to the Prevent duty.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- A strategy group had been established to consider how to respond to Prevent and an action plan had been produced. It was commented that the Prevent agenda covered sensitive and complex areas and it was essential to bring together colleagues with a range of knowledge and skills to respond to Prevent effectively.
- Engagement with schools was an essential part of the Prevent strategy. It was important to ensure that schools were meeting their obligations effectively. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Newington Green Primary had been appointed as the two schools to lead on the Prevent agenda locally. Their role was to provide support to other schools on how to implement Prevent.
- It was emphasised that Prevent was about safeguarding vulnerable young people with complex needs. It was commented that, if young people were vulnerable to radicalisation, then they would most likely be vulnerable in other ways too.
- It was essential for those working with young people, including school and council staff, to be appropriately trained on the Prevent duty. Effective training reduced the anxiety of staff and resulted in better targeted referrals.
- Although the Prevent strategy action plan was largely RAG rated 'green', it was commented that this was to be revised and re-focused on areas in need of improvement.
- A member queried how many Prevent referrals had been made. In response, it was commented that the numbers were very sensitive, however the Prevent agenda covered a wide spectrum of activity and, whilst people were right to be concerned about the threat of radicalisation, some referrals had previously been made following fairly low-level concerns. It was commented that Prevent had now bedded in and schools and teachers were taking a more balanced view.

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- Officers commented that it was essential that the Prevent agenda did not restrict the school curriculum or young people from expressing political opinions.
- A member queried if the Council worked to implement Prevent with supplementary schools and those who were home schooling their children. In response, it was advised that the Safeguarding Children Board had ensured that all voluntary sector organisations and supplementary schools had access to safeguarding materials, which included information on Prevent, although there was no obligation for this to be taken up. Training taken up by supplementary schools was logged and the impact monitored.
- In response to a question, it was advised that training was provided by both internal and external trainers and through specific online resources. Prevent training had been integrated into safeguarding training, and schools had embedded Prevent activities into PSHE and Citizenship.
- A member queried if officers could elaborate on the three school girls from Bethnal Green who travelled to Syria. In response, officers advised that such cases were discussed between local authorities to facilitate cross-borough learning, however the details were very sensitive.
- A member expressed concern at the recent increase in hate-crime, commenting that this was fuelled by islamophobic material published in the media, and compared this to anti-Irish sentiment in the 1970s.

RESOLVED:

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

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QUARTERLY REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE (Q2) (ITEM NO. B3)

Finola Culbert, Director of Targeted and Specialist Children's Services, and Mark Taylor, Director of Schools and Learning, introduced the report which summarised Children's Services performance in quarter two 2016/17.

The Committee considered the format of the quarterly performance report. It was noted that the Committee had previously resolved 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. The Committee emphasised that it was important for the same suite of performance indicators to be reported each quarter to enable progress to be monitored. It was agreed that a draft list of performance indicators would be circulated to members for comment.

The Committee noted that the number of children missing from home was significantly higher than the same period last year. It was explained that there was now a greater awareness of when to report children as missing and data had improved as a result. It was commented that children could go missing for a number of reasons; some were victims of child sexual exploitation, others were involved in drug dealing and gang violence, and others were staying with friends without permission. Officers advised that working with children missing from home was challenging work; however the Council had strong safeguarding systems in place.

RESOLVED:

- i) That Children's Services performance in quarter two 2016/17 be noted;
- ii) That the suite of performance indicators be revised and standardised in advance of the next quarterly report.

188 EXECUTIVE MEMBER QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. B4)

As the Executive Member had submitted apologies for absence, this item was deferred. It was suggested that any urgent questions could be submitted to the Executive Member by email.

189 REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B5)

Members indicated that it would be preferential to hold a visit as part of the review of Post-16 Education, Employment and Training before Christmas.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.30 pm

Chair