



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

Ernestas Jegorovas queried the progress of reducing energy usage in schools, commenting that increased energy efficiency would contribute to savings targets. It was advised that ten schools had installed photovoltaic panels however there had been no further installations since the reduction in the feed-in tariff in January 2016. It was noted that the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee had previously reviewed the community energy work in the borough and would be monitoring progress as part of the scrutiny process.

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

a) Evidence from Mer-IT

The Committee received a presentation from Mercedes and Alex from Mer-IT, a small community organisation which provided training, work experience and workshops to young people and others.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Mer-IT worked to develop the skills and experience of young people by providing free ICT training and other computer-based opportunities. The organisation also worked with unemployed people, older people and people with learning disabilities.
- The organisation offered a five day course focused on repairing broken laptops. Participants were able to keep the repaired laptop on completion of the course.
- Mer-IT operated a community repair service, where young people working with the organisation offered free laptop repairs to the local community. It was commented that this supported community cohesion and helped young people to develop their interpersonal skills.
- All young people working with the organisation were offered one day of work experience at a refurbishment warehouse.
- Mer-IT commented on how they worked with young people who were difficult to engage with. It was suggested that offering an incentive, such as a free laptop, encouraged these young people to participate in extra-curricular activities. It was also considered important to offer practical knowledge and experience which young people could apply in their daily lives.
- It was commented that small community organisations faced barriers to providing their services. In particular, having insufficient time to complete funding applications and receiving income inconsistently meant that it was difficult to plan and implement long-term projects. As a result it was sometimes not possible to offer support consistently.
- Mer-IT accepted 12 people per course and would work with between 50 and 60 young people over summer each year. The organisation had been running for three years and had a waiting list of around 100 people.
- The Chair commented on the importance of small community organisations in supporting the development of young people and queried how the council could best support such organisations. In response, it was advised that community groups were able to engage with the council's community and voluntary sector development officers, who could provide advice and guidance on funding and other aspects of running a community organisation.
- In response to a question, it was advised that Mer-IT did not offer formally accredited courses.

## Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 11 January 2017

- Although Mer-IT did not work with schools on a regular basis, the organisation had worked with 12 pupils from Highbury Fields School who faced various challenges.
- A member of the public queried if Mer-IT monitored the progress of young people who participated in their courses. It was advised that routine monitoring did not take place, however it was known that some young people had since taken up ICT-related employment. The organisation had received feedback from young people that they would like workshops to run on a more regular basis.

The Committee thanked Mercedes and Alex for their attendance.

### b) Evidence from Groundwork London

The Committee received a presentation from David Williams, NEET Achievement Coach Manager, on the work of Groundwork in supporting young people's education, employment and training.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Groundwork London offered three programmes which supported young people's education, employment and training; Pre-NEET, which worked in schools with young people at risk of becoming NEET; Targeted NEET, which worked with young people who had been excluded or had disengaged from education; and Aspire Higher, which worked with young people in pupil referral units and had an additional emphasis on diversion from gang-related activities.
- The Pre-NEET programme was funded by the Skills Funding Agency and worked with 1,340 young people across London. The programme involved Groundwork developing personalised action plans in partnership with young people at risk of becoming NEET and monitoring progress against it in weekly coaching sessions for 17-20 weeks.
- The Targeted NEET programme was funded by the Skills Funding Agency and the Youth Engagement Fund, and supported 200 young people aged 16 to 18 from across 10 London boroughs. The targeted programme consisted of more intense interventions, including one to one sessions in community settings and job-brokerage, with Young London Working providing ring-fenced job opportunities to participants. Groundwork worked in partnership with local authorities, colleges, housing associations and others to identify and support young people NEET.
- Groundwork considered that it was important to offer industry-related courses to young people NEET, and offering employability skills was not sufficient to attract the most difficult to engage young people. Young people NEET typically did not enjoy education and needed clear progression pathways to see the value in education.
- Aspire Higher had been developed in partnership with the Greater London Authority, Metropolitan Police, pupil referral units, and alternative education providers. The programme provided 18 months of support to 240 vulnerable young people across London. Groundwork expected 140 of these young people to move back into mainstream education, or progress into training or employment.
- Young people on the Aspire Higher programme were taken on trips outside of their borough and outside of London. Some young people would not usually travel outside of their immediate local area and it was commented that this was detrimental to their wellbeing and employment prospects. The Executive Member commented that such initiatives helped to develop the confidence of young people and diverted young people from gang-related activities. It was

## Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 11 January 2017

known that gangs tended to operate on a postcode basis and some young people perceived that they would be unsafe if they travelled to other areas.

- Following a question, it was advised that Groundwork had only recently started working in Islington and was supporting around 20 young people in the borough. It was commented that some of these young people had been referred through Peabody Housing Association.
- It was noted that there were similarities between the support programmes offered by Groundwork and Islington Council and it was queried if there was potential for the organisations to develop a close partnership arrangement. In response, it was advised that the council did work with Groundwork and this was particularly helpful when engaging with employers, who were often keen to work with charities.

The Committee thanked David Williams for his attendance.

c) Responses to questions raised by the Committee at 21 November 2016 meeting

Noted.

### 198 POST-16 EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING: NOTES OF SCRUTINY VISIT (ITEM NO. B2)

Noted.

### 199 ISLINGTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD: ANNUAL REPORT (ITEM NO. B3)

The report was presented by Alan Caton, Independent Chair of the Islington Safeguarding Children Board.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Safeguarding children was a challenging and complex area of work and the Safeguarding Children Board worked to ensure the effectiveness of local safeguarding mechanisms. It was emphasised that safeguarding children was everybody's responsibility.
- The safeguarding issues affecting children in Islington included neglect, child sexual exploitation, and domestic violence. The Board was also acutely aware of the increase in serious youth violence in recent years and had developed a multi-agency gang protocol to support interventions which sought to prevent and minimise gang violence.
- The Board had been reassured by an independent review that the council's Early Help services were effective and well-funded; however the Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board emphasised the importance of continuing to monitor the progress of such services.
- The importance of listening to children and young people was highlighted, particularly in the context of child protection conferences. The Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board had met with the Youth Council alongside partners from the Metropolitan Police to talk about knife crime and other issues.
- It was noted that very few private fostering arrangements were known to the council. The Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board commented that there were likely to be many such arrangements which were not known to local agencies and highlighted the safeguarding risks associated with private

## Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 11 January 2017

fostering. The Safeguarding Children Board had called for Islington Council to be proactive in investigating such arrangements.

- The Board considered that health partners should be further involved in children's social care strategy discussions, as health colleagues were only involved in four out of ten instances. Systems had since been implemented to improve this.
- Two serious case reviews had taken place in 2015/16 and work was underway to disseminate learning from those reviews. A review of knife crime had recently been completed.
- The Chair of the Safeguarding Children Board advised that changes to safeguarding frameworks had been proposed through the Children and Social Work Bill. It was important to ensure that oversight of local safeguarding arrangements remained robust through any transition period.
- The Committee commended the Safeguarding Board for producing a focused report which clearly communicated the safeguarding achievements and risks in Islington.
- It was queried how local agencies were working to tackle CSE in the borough. In response, it was advised that there had been too few successful prosecutions in the past and work was underway to both raise awareness of CSE and to bring perpetrators to justice.
- It was queried how effective working relationships were between local agencies involved in safeguarding. In response, it was advised that it had previously been a challenge to engage the CPS in safeguarding issues however this was improving.
- It was commented that a recent inspection of the Metropolitan Police's safeguarding activity had been particularly poor and it was hoped that their safeguarding procedures would improve as a result.
- In response to a query on how to increase the input of young people in safeguarding matters, it was advised that members of the Safeguarding Children Board had met with young people at a local primary school to discuss their concerns and how they perceived safeguarding risks. It was thought that increasing the frequency of such meetings would be useful. It was also suggested that a shadow safeguarding children board comprised of young people would help to ensure that young people's views were embedded into services.
- It was queried how the Safeguarding Children Board engaged with harder to reach communities. In response, the Chair of the Board commented that he was not aware of any problems in engaging with different sectors of the community, however acknowledged that certain outreach work needed to be appropriately targeted to ensure it reached its intended recipients.
- A member of the public queried the systems put in place to increase the engagement of health partners in strategy discussions. In response, it was advised that a health practitioner was now located in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub.
- It was noted that the Police made a relatively small contribution towards the budget of the Safeguarding Children Board. It was advised that all London Safeguarding Children Boards had written to the Commissioner about the Police's financial contribution; and the Leader of the Council had also requested increased funding. It was hoped that the recent inspection of the Police's safeguarding activity would be a catalyst for increasing their contribution.

The Committee thanked Alan Caton for his attendance.

Councillor Ismail left the meeting.

**200**      **SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN ANNUAL REPORT (ITEM NO. B4)**

The report was presented by Finola Culbert, Director of Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Services.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- There had been an increase in contacts and referrals to children's services which reflected trends across London. It was understood that this was a result of greater awareness of child safeguarding issues. Safeguarding cases had also increased in complexity, which was thought to be a national trend.
- It was reported that 79% of assessments were completed within 45 days, which officers considered to be a good level of performance. Although the report indicated that there had been an increase in waiting times for initial conferences, it was commented that this issue had since been resolved.
- The number of repeat child protection plans was very high in 2015/16; however an audit had found that the majority of children subject to repeat plans had their previous plan several years ago. Officers were satisfied that this increase could not have been anticipated.
- Whilst officers were not satisfied with the number of known private fostering arrangements, it was commented that the council was largely reliant on other agencies reporting such arrangements. The council was encouraging its services and other agencies to ask young people about their living arrangements.
- The reduction in the number of Children Looked After in Islington was more significant than the reductions experienced by Islington's statistical neighbours. It was commented that the current cohort of looked after children was older than previous cohorts due to an increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, who were usually teenage.
- It was advised that there was no limit to social worker caseloads; however Ofsted expected a maximum of 15 cases per worker, which the council was achieving on average. It was reported that newly qualified social workers had a caseload of around 12 cases, with more experienced workers taking on more cases.
- It was reported that the Safeguarding Children Board had reviewed the council's practices in relation to young people being kept in police custody overnight and this was contributing to ongoing judicial review proceedings. It was suggested that the issues raised through the judicial review were not unique to Islington.
- Islington was the lead authority for the North London 'Step Up to Social Work' programme which sought to recruit new social workers. It was hoped that this would reduce the number of agency staff employed by the service, which was around 20%
- Following a question related to the judicial review, it was advised that the number of young people in custody who met the criteria for overnight accommodation was very low.

The Committee thanked Finola Culbert for her attendance.

**201**      **EXECUTIVE MEMBER QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. B5)**

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

## Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 11 January 2017

Following a question, the Executive Member expressed his frustration with the lack of progress from central government on county lines drug dealing. It was advised that this issue was well known to London Boroughs and the surrounding County Councils which were mapping arrests and compiling data, however a centralised approach was needed. The Executive Member suggested that the Home Office had not given the issue sufficient priority and was not considering the issue from a safeguarding perspective.

The Committee queried the impact of the campaign against the Ladbroke House Free School. In response, the Executive Member commented that the concerns of the council and the community had not been addressed and therefore it was essential to campaign publicly on the issue. It was reported that a feasibility document revealed through a Freedom of Information request did not make reference to either Highbury Fields or Highbury Grove schools.

Ernestas Jegorovas queried if Islington would take up the offer from central government to fund Mental Health First Aid training in schools. In response, it was advised that the council already offered free Mental Health First Aid training to anyone who lived, worked or studied in the borough; however additional resources for this from central government would be welcomed.

The Committee thanked Councillor Caluori for his attendance.

### **202      REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B6)**

Noted.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.00 pm

Chair