

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 10 June 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 10 June 2024 at 7.00 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Ozdemir (Chair), Bossman-Quarshie (Vice-Chair), Cinko-Oner, Jegorovas-Armstrong, McHugh, Ogunro, Pandor, Zammit, Susie Graves (Co-Optee), Mary Clement (Co-Optee), McNeill (Co-Optee) and Turpin (Co-Optee)

Councillor Gulcin Ozdemir in the Chair

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)

Apologies were received from the Executive Member for Children, Young People & Families.

2 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)

There were no declarations of substitute members.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)

There were no declarations of interest.

4 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the former Children's Services Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 29th April 2024 confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

5 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)

The Chair welcomed members and officers to the first meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee, which superseded the former Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair advised members and officers that the meeting was being held during the pre-election period of the 4th July General Election, and asked all to be mindful of the pre-election guidance when discussing the items of business this evening.

Officers and members thanked the Director of Learning & Achievement, Sarah Callaghan, for her service, who was moving on to Cambridgeshire County Council.

6 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A6)

None.

7 MEMBERSHIP, TERMS OF REFERENCE, DATES OF MEETINGS (Item D1)

RESOLVED:

That the membership, terms of reference and dates of meetings for the Committee as confirmed at Annual Council on 16th May 2024, be agreed.

8

SCRUTINY TOPIC AND WORK PROGRAMME (Item D2)

The Chair outlined that they had met with officers to review a provisional work programme to be put to members for agreement and/or suggestions on any further topics that members would like to be considered and that the work programme put to members, contained the standard items of business. The Chair also reminded members that in suggesting additional items of business, it had to be considered that there had to be sufficient time at each scheduled meeting to consider them and amendments/additions to the work programme was at the Chair's final discretion.

The Chair also stated the committee was being asked to select its' principal topic of scrutiny for the municipal year, for which the Chair expressed a preference to focus on the topic of attendance. In the discussion, the following points were raised:

- Members stated that young people had told them that a topic of concern among young people was mental health support and that many would appreciate further help from the Council.
- Members suggested looking at the topic of secondary transitions and absences among this cohort.
- Members suggested scrutinising Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in the borough and why there were so many children with special educational needs struggling in mainstream education.
- Another suggestion from members was to scrutinise the youth offer to prevent some of the challenges that our young people have, to work across other departments to see how they could support the youth offer, and to address findings from the youth justice plan that some young people felt that they had no place to be.
- Members suggested that attendance being a national issue that had also been raised as a point of concern at the previous meetings of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee should be a focus of review for the committee and that the topic could indirectly touch on some of the other issues being raised by members.
- Members also highlighted the importance of early intervention in addressing attendance and speaking to the children and young people directly in the process.
- The committee were mindful that there would not be sufficient time within the municipal year to comprehensively scrutinise each topic of suggestion for principal scrutiny in depth, and members needed to prioritise would be achievable and could make an impact. If findings from the principal scrutiny review pointed to other drivers such as mental health and wellbeing, this could then be taken up as a matter of investigation for the next municipal year.
- Members noted that the work programme was provisional and flexible, with amendments possible later during the municipal year subject to Chair and officer agreement.
- Members expressed an ambition to see the Council being more collaborative with local businesses, utilising local spaces and services to support schools' offer and to implement innovative approaches to brokering work experience opportunities.
- Officers informed the committee that there was work being undertaken on an attendance 'call to arms', which would outline that the attendance crisis could not be left to schools to address alone and required a system-wide response.
- Officers highlighted that the attendance duty had been removed from local authorities several years ago, including the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) post as part of a change in national policy at the time.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 10 June 2024

- Officers acknowledged that the borough's attendance rate still required improvement and highlighted complex emotional-based school avoidance as a particular issue of concern among secondary school girls.
- Officers stated that one school in the borough had 20% of a single year group affected by emotional-based school avoidance, which was posing a practical challenge to school staff.
- Officers stated that they were happy to revisit specific areas of the SEND Transitions scrutiny review's recommendations as and when required.
- Islington was one of twenty local authorities involved in the SEND Change management programme, which was an opportunity for the borough to test and learn new approaches. One of these opportunities was to introduce a tiered approach to alternative provision (AP) in which the emphasis would be on outreach and preventative work rather than treating Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) as a destination.
- Members also suggested including in the scope of review, looking at the numbers on the waiting list for CAMHS and those with suspected SEND needs that were awaiting assessments.
- Members expressed an interest for the Special Guardianship item to address what the Council's offer for its special guardians currently entails.

ACTION

Officers to provide a further update on the implementation of the recommendations of the 2021-22 SEND Transitions scrutiny review.

ACTION:

Officers to provide data on the correlation between attendance and exclusions, specifically how many children at secondary school have been excluded/suspended because of their attendance.

ACTION:

Officers to investigate whether public health data on the waiting list for CAMHS and SEND assessments for Islington families, including the number on the list, the average waiting times, and impacts of this, to members.

ACTION

Officers to provide the SEND update and information to the meeting of September 2024 rather than January 2024.

ACTION

The Chair to attend a meeting of the Homes and Communities Scrutiny Committee to contribute the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee's views to their 2024-25 scrutiny review.

ACTION

Officers to move the Special Guardianship report to the committee's meeting in November 2024.

RESOLVED:

That with the amendments above, the 2024-25 Work Programme and scrutiny topic on attendance be approved.

9

2023 SACRE ANNUAL REPORT (Item D3)

Officers presented the annual SACRE report to the committee. In the discussion, the following key points were raised:

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 10 June 2024

- Religious education was not currently part of the national curriculum and SACRE fulfilled a statutory responsibility to advise the local authority on how it is implemented within the borough's-maintained schools. This did not include academies or voluntary aided schools, which equated to 40% of schools.
- The report had some recommendations which included to recruit a diverse section of members to the SACRE board, to agree a renewed syllabus and to support secondary schools to improve outcomes on GCSEs.
- There had been a notable increase in the number of entries since from 497 in 2019, to 611 in 2023.
- Officers stated that the data was comparing like for like when grade boundaries were the same in 2019, with the intermittent years during the COVID-19 pandemic removed.
- Officers stated that although there had been an overall slight decline in outcomes, there had been an increase in higher level grades.
- Officers stated that it was important that the religious education syllabus was suitable for children of faith and those without and to foster a broader depth of understanding and tolerance.
- Responding to members questions about whether there was any insight into the curriculum at free schools, officers advised that SACRE was aiming to secure engagement across all sectors and a three-year development plan was being developed for this purpose.
- Members stated that the report referred to 2011 Census data, and that where possible, this should refer to 2021 census data instead.
- Members noted that the number of GCSEs awarded. In response, officers noted members' concerns and stated that conversations around grades and attainment with individual schools' feature as part of the professional partner programme, but that this would take place across the board and there was dialogue with academies and free schools also. Officers further stated that there was a relentless drive to improve outcomes and suggested that in the next report, providing a section to outline to the committee what a student at Level 3 would have gained in the two years of study, that they otherwise would not have done.
- It was noted that it was important to acknowledge that the subject of religious education was not considered or talked of as being less than other subjects.

ACTION

Officers to ensure that the 2021 census data is included in the new report and also circulated, separately to members.

ACTION

Officers to ensure that examples of collective worship are included in future reports.

ACTION

Officers to provide comparative data on religious education results with statistical neighbours and against results from the COVID-19 Pandemic period.

ACTION

Officers to provide data on how many have chosen to study religious education against those that have had to do so compulsorily.

RESOLVED:

That the 2023 SACRE Annual Report be noted.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 10 June 2024

Officers presented the Quarter Three performance report to the committee. In the discussion, the following points were raised:

- In response to member questions concerning Islington's high exclusion rate compared to other inner London boroughs, officers stated that while there was a lag in the data, the matter was being taken seriously. Officers further stated that the data had been skewed disproportionately by a small number of secondary schools and conversations were being had with them to address the issue, both directly and through the deputy heads network. Contextually, officers also noted that Islington had the highest level of SEN need in London and formed a disproportionate percentage of the borough's school population.
- Officers stated that eighteen months previously, Islington had been in the bottom fifth quartile for exclusions but had since improved significantly, and similarly there had also been reductions in suspensions.
- In response to members' highlighting of the rise of re-referrals to children's social care, officers stated that this issue had been examined in the auditing and practice week and related to a small number of children. Officers further stated that it appeared there was a rising number of parents suffering with mental health problems, poverty and discrimination, and that this was disproportionately affecting families from particular backgrounds. All cases were monitored and there were robust step-down processes in place when they were closed.
- Officers advised that in terms of placement instability, there was an overrepresentation from particular backgrounds in Islington and this disproportionality was replicated nationally.
- Members noted that the data showed that the Black Caribbean boys' cohort had performed well in Islington's schools in this reporting period, but it was stated that while Black Caribbean boys did outperform inner London and national averages, it was still below the average across Islington and that a challenge remained to improve outcomes for this cohort.
- Officers stated that 2023 attainment eight outcomes could only be genuinely compared like for like with 2019, as the intervening period was heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Officers stated that more schools were sharing best practice which they had previously been protective of and this collaboration was the basis on which improvements could be made across the school estate.
- In response to member questions, officers advised that child protection plans were intended to be supportive and could last between six months to two years depending on severity and circumstances.
- In response to member concerns about how the borough was supporting young people that were excluded from settings, officers advised that discussions were taking place with headteachers about how to tackle inclusion, create a sense of belonging and means of collaboration that can help address the issue. The importance of individual school leadership was also highlighted.
- Officers advised that the most prevalent reason for exclusions was low-level disruption, which could potentially be driven by an unmet need.
- Members noted an increase in social care contact, to which officers advised that managers were regularly monitoring the increasing numbers.
- Officers informed members that children who were excluded from school were more likely to have poorer educational outcomes and were also more likely to be involved with the criminal justice system.
- Officers stated that the current approach was to shift the perception of a Pupil Referral Unit to not be seen as a destination or objective, and instead to focus on preventative work that would enable young people to stay in mainstream education. Officers further stated that there were three tiers in the tiered trial on Alternative Provision, which was prevention, outreach and specialist support.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 10 June 2024

- Officers stated that more needed to be done to address the issue of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) more widely, and that there needed to be a preventative approach that started early, including raising awareness through PHSE and Citizenship lessons. Staff were skilled and experienced and were able to support victims but there was still more work to be done to stamp out the practice.
- Members stated that it was testament to officers hard work that victims were coming forward to report Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and expressed the hope that it would encourage other victims to come forward and instil a deterrent to offenders.

ACTION

Officers to provide data on whether children with three or more placements were predominantly from Black Caribbean background.

ACTION

Officers to ensure future quarterly performance reports incorporate data/indicators on children and young people's physical activity, health, and wellbeing, so as to account for the committee's broadened remit.

ACTION

Officers to share data on exclusions shared by schools that had been presented to the former Childrens Services Scrutiny Committee.

ACTION

Officers to provide, if possible, the numbers of children the data relates to in the Key Stage 4 Attainment 8 table.

ACTION

Officers to provide more granular data on placement stability, i.e the timeframe that re-referrals are occurring in.

ACTION

Officers to provide further data on exclusions, including a breakdown by need, what amounts to an exclusion and where possible, how decisions to exclude pupils are reached.

ACTION

Officers to provide data on how many FGM cases there are in the borough.

RESOLVED

That the Quarter 3 Performance report be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.47 pm

CHAIR