

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 15 September 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Tuesday, 15 September 2015 at 7.30 pm.

Present: Councillors: Comer-Schwartz (Chair), Donovan, Ismail, Picknell, Ward and Wayne

Co-opted Member: Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese

Also Present: Councillors: Caluori and Convery (in part)

Councillor Kaya Comer-Schwartz in the Chair

67 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nick Ward.

68 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A2)

None.

69 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A3)

None.

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

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

71 CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)

The Chair advised that the Executive had noted the Committee's recommendations made through the Early Help review and would be making a full response later in the year.

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

None.

73 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)

The Chair outlined the procedure for public questions and the filming and recording of meetings.

74 UPDATE ON THE YOUTH CRIME STRATEGY (ITEM NO. B1)

The Committee received an update from Councillors Paul Convery, Executive Member for Community Safety, and Joe Caluori, Executive Member for Children and Families, on the Youth Crime Strategy, agreed by the Executive in July 2015.

A discussion was had during which the following main points were made:

- The Strategy was prepared in the context of increased youth offending in the borough; it was commented that there had been growing concerns about violent offences, snatch thefts and drug-related crime. In particular, the Committee noted the shock and concern of local people at the two murders that occurred in Islington over the summer of 2015.

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- It was explained that there were three strands to the Strategy: enforcement, deterrence, and community response. The Executive was keen to implement the strategy as soon as possible. The Strategy was to be supplemented by an implementation plan, which the Leader was overseeing the preparation of. It was advised that the implementation plan would be circulated to members in due course.
- It was too early to say if the Strategy was effective, however following firm police enforcement the number of knife offences in the borough had decreased, from three in July, to none in August and none in September to date. It was commented that this was partially due to prolific offenders being in police custody; however these individuals were expected to be released in the near future. The need to work with young people to reduce offending was emphasised.
- The Committee was advised of positive work being carried out with St Giles Trust, a charity which worked with ex-offenders and disadvantaged people to break the cycle of offending. 180 young people in the borough had been identified as associated with gang violence, 50 of those had been targeted to work with the charity, and half of those had responded positively.
- The Executive Members were hopeful that the Council had command of the immediate problem, however advised that further work was needed from the Council, its partners, schools, the Police and the community to significantly reduce levels of youth crime in the borough.
- It was commented that the generation currently committing youth crime were born between 1996-99, typically did not have a strong family support network, were from families where adults were not working, and grew up at a time when the Council did not prioritise early help initiatives and there was a general reluctance to take children into care. It was commented that this demonstrated the importance of investing in early help services, to intervene early in life to stop problems becoming entrenched.
- Councillor Caluori advised of his recent visit to Leeds to learn more about best practice in restorative justice programmes. The importance of listening to young people was emphasised, especially those who had experience of the criminal justice system. It was suggested that the Youth Council could also contribute to this work.
- It was queried how success against the strategy would be measured. It was advised that key performance indicators had been identified, however many of these were related to process changes, such as further integration with the Police, as opposed to statistical outcomes. There was a target to halve the number of children in Alternative Provision by the end of 2016, and it was hoped that the strategy would lead to a sustained reduction in young people being the victims of violent crime. Reducing youth crime to levels experienced in 2011 before the recent increase in gang violence would be considered a success. It was noted that all performance measures were set out in the strategy implementation plan.
- A member queried why the number of young people in Alternative Provision entering the youth justice system had decreased while the overall number of youth crimes had increased. It was explained that some young offenders had become more prolific. The Committee also expressed concern with the number of instances where young people had been arrested by the Police but then released with 'no further action' for reasons of insufficient evidence or a low possibility of successful prosecution. The Council was working with the Police to ensure that the small number of young people who had been repeatedly arrested and then released with no further action did not necessarily have a 'clean slate' and that intelligence on these suspected offenders was not lost.

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- It was advised that although there was no direct link between the two recent murders in the borough, there was a great deal in common between the two incidents, including the age of the offenders and that the offenders were on the periphery of established gangs.
- The Committee noted the three primary gang rivalries in the borough, which were between gangs operating in the Caledonian area and the Clerkenwell and Bunhill areas; the Mayville Estate and the Essex Road area; and the Elthorne Estate and the Andover Estate. The Council was keen to not label these gangs in terms of estates, as gang members were often from a much wider geographic area and were not associated with the people living on those estates.
- It was advised that the 180 young people in the borough associated with gang violence were typically aged 14 to 18, from all parts of the borough and of all ethnicities and faiths. The majority had traumatic lives and had been in Alternative Provision. The importance of understanding these children was emphasised.
- It was advised that a number of young offenders had been witnesses or victims of domestic violence. Some offenders had been groomed to commit crimes by older criminals, including trafficking drugs to rural and coastal areas. Some of the gangs operating in the borough were organised by older established criminals and had an influence beyond the borough.
- In response to a query about possible 'quick wins' to increase prevention; it was advised that the targeted youth service had been working on offending prevention over the summer and it was thought that the work in partnership with the St Giles Trust had led to positive outcomes, although further evaluation of this work was needed.
- It was queried if the Council was working with local health services to gather intelligence. It was advised that the Council was working with youth workers in local hospitals however could work further with primary care providers.
- The Committee expressed concern at the proposal for the Metropolitan Police to decommission all PCSOs. The Committee valued neighbourhood policing; it was noted that local officers had knowledge of how Islington gangs operated, and how the structure of these gangs was more fluid than in other areas.
- It was queried if the youth crime rate would be lower if a strategy was implemented earlier. Although it was not possible to say if particular offences would not have been committed, it was suggested that resources were stretched and agencies had not prioritised youth crime as high as it should have been.
- The Police had a good knowledge of older gang members, as these were often members of established crime families and had been imprisoned. Policing of these professional gangs was dealt with at a London-wide level due to its seriousness and intricacies.
- A member of the public queried linkages between Alternative Provision and youth offending. It was advised that a new team had been established to support children in Alternative Provision. It was queried how many pupils had left Alternative Provision and become NEET; it was advised that this figure would be circulated with the minutes.
- A member of the public queried how the Council would ensure that young people did not feel victimised by enhancing the focus on youth crime, especially as 'stop and search' exercises only had a 20% success rate. It was commented that stop and search was a legitimate policing tactic when it was intelligence-led and had led to the recovery of drugs and weaponry, although the concerns of its overuse and association to ethnic profiling were recognised. The Executive Members emphasised that the vast majority of young people had no connection to youth crime and that the public should not be worried about groups of young people congregating.

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- The Committee requested a further update on the Youth Crime Strategy in April 2016.

The Committee thanked Councillors Convery and Caluori for their attendance.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee receive a further update on the Youth Crime Strategy in April 2016.

75

ALTERNATIVE PROVISION: SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT AND INTRODUCTORY REPORT (ITEM NO. B2)

Gabby Grodentz, Head of Alternative Provision, and Mark Taylor, Director of Learning and Schools, made a presentation to the Committee, copy interleaved, about Alternative Provision in Islington. The Committee also considered an introductory report and a draft Scrutiny Initiation Document.

A discussion was had during which the following main points were made:

- The Committee noted the context of Alternative Provision in the borough. Alternative Provision was for pupils in Years 10 and 11 who were unable to receive a suitable education in a traditional school setting due to exclusion, illness, behavioural issues, or other reasons.
- Islington currently had 105 pupils in Alternative Provision who attended various settings across North London. Of these, at least 90 had previously received some form of targeted intervention from local agencies. Wraparound support was provided alongside Alternative Provision to support pupils. It was noted that those in Alternative Provision were often vulnerable, had been excluded from school, or were young offenders.
- Officers explained that the Council had improved the quality of its data in recent years. Since 2010 the Council had recorded the outcomes of those leaving Alternative Provision, which helped to evaluate the effectiveness of services.
- Due to an increased focus on finding further education or training for those leaving Alternative Provision at the end of Year 11, the number of young people leaving Alternative Provision classified as NEET by November had reduced year on year. However, it was noted that the number classified as NEET increased during Year 12 each year as pupils dropped off their courses. It was speculated that this was due to the pupils no longer receiving wraparound support alongside their studies.
- There were no more than 12 pupils to each Alternative Provision class and each pupil was required to opt for 25 hours of education each week. Pupils were only able to opt for fewer than 25 hours of education in exceptional circumstances, such as medical reasons.
- Although pupils were required to receive 25 hours of education each week, it was noted that poor attendance was commonplace and as a result the majority did not receive the full 25 hours. The national expectation for attendance was 95%, however only 12.9% of pupils in Alternative Provision achieved this level in Islington. Officers commented that for some pupils, attendance of between 50-80% was considered an achievement given their historic level of absence. It was explained that these pupils did not necessarily truant and their absence may be caused by other factors, such as domestic violence or bereavement.
- A member commented on the benefits of counselling for vulnerable young people.

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- Officers advised of recent improvements to quality assurance processes. It was explained that many local authorities in North London used the same providers and as a result providers previously received three or four inspections each year. This was considered to be onerous and disruptive, and as a result North London boroughs had agreed to a single quality assurance framework which required one inspection each year, the results of which were shared electronically.
- All providers used by the Council were rated either 'Good' or 'Requires Improvement'. The Council did not continue to use providers rated as inadequate.
- It was noted that Islington appeared to have a greater number of Alternative Provision referrals compared to other North London boroughs, however there were differences in how data was collected which meant that the data from other authorities was not considered accurate. Neighbouring boroughs had a large number of academies which referred to providers directly and as a result the local authorities had no exact data on the number of young people in Alternative Provision. It was confirmed that the two academies in Islington did provide information on how many pupils were referred to Alternative Provision and therefore the figure of 105 pupils was accurate.
- The borough had 105 pupils in Alternative Provision for 2015/16, which was the lowest number on record, with the highest number being 215. Islington no longer placed pupils in Year 9 in Alternative Provision and instead sought other support for the small number of pupils who would otherwise have been referred.
- The Committee noted the demographics of those on Alternative Provision. There was a gender gap, with the number of boys being more than double the number of girls for each of the past four years. There was a disproportionate number of White British and Black Caribbean pupils in Alternative Provision, with 60% of the cohort being White British, compared to 21.7% of the mainstream cohort, and 20% being Black Caribbean, compared to 6.7% of the mainstream cohort.
- Officers spoke of their concerns regarding the attainment of pupils in Alternative Provision. In particular, performance in English and Maths was historically poor, however was slowly improving. It was explained that the majority of pupils worked towards Functional Skills qualifications as opposed to GCSEs. A 'Level 1' qualification was equivalent to D-G at GCSE, and a 'Level 2' was equivalent to A*-C at GCSE. Although officers were hopeful of an increase in attainment following a decrease in the previous year, it was only expected for 35.7% of pupils to achieve a Level 1 or higher in both English and Maths.
- The Committee noted that the Council could receive up to £7,703 of external funding per pupil, subject to certain eligibility criteria. The cost of providing Alternative Provision varied between £4,000 and £14,000 per pupil, and therefore achieving value for money was very important.
- The Council had recently appointed an Education Welfare Officer who was tasked with improving attendance. The Council was also in the process of appointing an IFIT worker to work in the three highest-referring schools with the families of Year 9s at risk of being referred to Alternative Provision.
- Officers provided two case studies to highlight the differing experiences and outcomes of young people in Alternative Provision. One young male was referred to Alternative Provision, after initially engaging he suddenly stopped and his attendance dropped to 30%. It was discovered that a gang had taken him to a house outside of London where he was left by himself and forced to sell drugs. Once he was re-integrated into Alternative Provision his attendance improved to 82%, he received 3 A*s at GCSE and won a scholarship to a high-ranking boarding school, where he was studying for four AS levels. This

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positive outcome was in contrast to another young male who was achieving above average results at Key Stage 3, however insisted that he did not want to sit GCSEs and preferred vocational education outside of school. He entered Alternative Provision; however had behavioural difficulties and his attendance rate decreased. His parents had difficulties setting boundaries at home, however refused support from the local authority. He developed a cannabis habit and left Alternative Provision classified as NEET. Officers considered that further work with the pupil in Year 9 could have significantly improved his outcomes.

- Officers suggested that the Committee could focus on how to reduce referrals to Alternative Provision, how to reduce the number of pupils in Alternative Provision, how to raise the number of pupils sitting Level 2 qualifications, and how to best support the most vulnerable pupils.
- Following a query, it was advised that aside from Functional Skills, pupils also studied for BTEC qualifications and other vocational courses. Many girls were studying hair and beauty or childcare. It was advised that a detailed analysis of courses would be presented to a future meeting.
- The Committee raised some concern with the lack of providers offering Science and ICT; only one provider offered science and only two offered ICT. It was commented that these subjects required specialist equipment and experienced teachers who may not be available to providers.
- It was confirmed that many of the children in Alternative Provision were from single parent families.
- It was queried how the Council monitored attendance when pupils were attending courses across North London. It was advised that electronic registers were used and only the Council was able to authorise absence.
- The Executive Member for Children and Families commented on the disproportionate number of White British pupils in Alternative Provision and advised of Camden Council's 'White British Achievement Project'.
- It was queried why the IFIT worker would be working with pupils in Year 9, as greater benefit may be gained from taking an 'early intervention' approach of targeting pupils at a younger age. It was advised that the impact of the IFIT work would be evaluated and, if successful, could be carried out from Year 7 onwards.
- It was suggested that some schools in the borough had very low referral rates and best practice could be learned from these schools. Although Islington schools had varying demographic profiles, this was not considered to be a significant factor in the numbers of young people being referred to Alternative Provision.
- A member of the public queried if the Council had analysed the risk of local authority schools becoming academies. It was advised that the Council was not aware of any schools in the borough currently contemplating becoming academies. However, it was noted that the Government permitted providers of Alternative Provision to register as academies and free schools and it was expected that providers would face pressure to convert in future.
- It was agreed that the SID be amended to include an objective to consider the attendance of those in Alternative Provision.
- It was agreed that the SID be amended to include an objective to evaluate the range of Alternative Provision available.
- It was agreed that the SID be amended to make reference to the demand for therapeutic interventions among pupils in Alternative Provision.
- It was agreed to consider witness evidence relating to Camden's White British Achievement Project.
- The Committee considered that a visit to a local provider of Alternative Provision would be more useful than a visit to a 'good practice' local authority.

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- The Committee agreed that it was important to consider evidence from a range of secondary schools and academies.

The Committee thanked the officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted;
- 2) That the Scrutiny Initiation Document be agreed, subject to the following amendments:
 - a) Objective 3 be amended to include reference to the attendance of those in Alternative Provision;
 - b) Objective 5 be amended to make reference to the range of Alternative Provision available;
 - c) 'Scope' be amended to make reference to the demand for therapeutic interventions;
 - d) 'Witness evidence' be amended to specify that the Committee is to consider evidence from a range of secondary schools;
 - e) 'Witness Evidence' be amended to make reference to Camden's White British Achievement Project;
 - f) 'Visits' be amended to read 'A local provider of alternative provision, such as New River College'.

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WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16 (ITEM NO. B3)

The Committee considered its work programme for 2015/16. It was noted that the Executive Member for Children and Families would be available at each meeting to answer questions submitted in advance. In addition, the Committee requested that the Executive Member submit a short briefing note to each meeting updating the Committee on his work and related issues.

It was advised that Councillor Nick Ward was seeking a date for an informal member workshop on child sexual exploitation in the near future.

It was advised that a press release would be issued on the work programmes of all of the Council's scrutiny committees to raise awareness of their work and how the public can attend meetings.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be agreed, subject to the addition of an update on the Youth Crime Strategy in April 2016.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.20 pm

Chair

APPENDIX – Further to minute 74

Query – “How many pupils had left Alternative Provision and become NEET?”

Response – There were 109 Year 11 leavers at the end of the 2013/14 academic year. Of these, 74 attended off-side Alternative Provision and 35 attended the New River College Pupil Referral Unit.

Of this cohort, 18 (16.5%) were classified as NEET at November 2014. This figure is comprised of 13 young people who had attended off-side Alternative Provision, and 5 who had attended New River College.