

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 11 January 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, 11 January 2016 at 7.30 pm.

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

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

Also Present: **Councillors:** Caluori

Councillor Kaya Comer-Schwartz in the Chair

88 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Angela Picknell and Diarmaid Ward.

89 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A2)

None.

90 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A3)

None.

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

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

92 CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)

The Chair reminded members of the forthcoming scrutiny visit to meet staff working in the Alternative Provision service.

It was agreed that Item B3 on the agenda, Impact of Special Educational Needs and Disability Changes on Children and Families, be deferred to a future meeting to enable the Committee to question the relevant officers.

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

None.

94 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)

None.

95 ISLINGTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15 (ITEM NO. B1)

Alan Caton, Independent Chair of the Islington Safeguarding Children Board (ISCB), presented the report which summarised the Board's safeguarding work in 2014/15.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

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- The ISCB had a statutory duty to coordinate the safeguarding work of local agencies and to ensure that local agencies were effective in their safeguarding work.
- It was advised that 2014/15 was a challenging year in which local agencies had to consider how to best safeguard children in light of increasing financial pressures. Despite this, it was reported that the timeliness of statutory assessments had improved, which was a priority for the year.
- The ISCB was pleased that independent assessments of Early Help services indicated that they were effective in helping to reduce demand for statutory services.
- The ISCB welcomed two new lay members in 2014/15 and they had made a positive contribution to the work of the Board. It was also noted that a number of agencies had increased their involvement and were chairing ISCB sub-groups.
- The Independent Chair outlined the priorities of the Board in improving the collective effectiveness of agencies. These were: (i) addressing the impact of neglect on children, including by helping them to become more resilient; (2) addressing the consequences / harm suffered as a result of domestic violence, parental mental health and substance abuse; and (iii) identification of children who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and holding perpetrators to account.
- The Committee noted the safeguarding work undertaken with local schools, including the *Chelsea's Choice* production.
- It was noted that the ISCB had approached other strategic partnerships to ask what steps they would take to contribute to the priorities of the Board.
- The Committee was advised of several ISCB-led audits, including an audit of FGM which found weaknesses in information sharing. As a result a number of cases were reviewed and a follow-up audit found that improvements had been made.
- The ISCB had a responsibility to review child deaths. There were 18 such deaths in 2014/15, an increase on the average of 14 deaths per year. The reasons for these deaths ranged from young children having serious medical conditions, to older teenage victims of knife crime. The ISCB was concerned about gang violence in Islington.
- The Committee considered the future priorities of the Board. The ISCB was working to encourage universal services to engage with Early Help services and to support all agencies in taking ownership of safeguarding matters. The Board had a particular interest in private fostering arrangements and was working with health agencies and schools to identify children in such arrangements. The ISCB also wished to gain a greater understanding of serious youth violence; and would be working with children to shape local services.
- The Committee noted the work of ISCB to target child sexual exploitation. In particular, the Board was working with partners to achieve greater use of intelligence to better target offenders.
- The ISCB was concerned about the relatively small numbers of offenders being prosecuted for neglect offences.
- It was commented that the report was abstruse in places and it was not clear what audience the report was written for. It was explained that the report was written in accordance with statutory guidance and the executive summary was intended to be a more accessible summary. It was advised that the reports of other safeguarding boards were similar and the national association of safeguarding boards was reviewing the format of such reports. It was also noted that the government was reviewing the role of safeguarding boards and reporting arrangements could be altered as a result.
- The Committee queried the ISCB's relationship with the CPS, as it was noted in the report that better partnership arrangements were required. It was

advised that the CPS was not a statutory member of the Board, however the ISCB had asked for the CPS to attend local and London-wide meetings and to date there had been no engagement. It was explained that this was particularly important given an apparent contradiction between certain Police and CPS statistics. The Committee expressed concern at the lack of CPS engagement and noted that the Leader of the Council was raising this matter through the Local Government Association.

- Following a query on publication timescales, it was advised that the report covered the period 1 April to 31 March. Data for the end of the year became available in early summer and the annual report was required to be published by September.
- It was advised that encouraging preventative actions and early intervention was a priority of the ISCB. The Board considered work with schools and young people to be crucial.
- Following a question on how the Board was addressing mental health, radicalisation and FGM, it was clarified that the ISCB was a strategic board and did not work on an operational level, however the Board was working to ensure that partner agencies had effective policies and procedures to deal with all aspects of safeguarding. Cathy Blair, Director of Targeted and Specialist Children's Services, advised that schools and children's centres occasionally raised concerns about FGM with the local authority and in such instances officers approached families about the issue.
- It was advised that, of the 18 child deaths in 2014/15, two were as a result of knife crime. Three deaths had 'modifiable factors' and were therefore considered preventable. The Board was not aware of the numbers of young people apprehended by the Police for carrying knives, however could investigate such statistics in future. It was confirmed that children apprehended for such crimes were referred to social services.
- It was commented that some of the ISCB's priorities seemed nebulous and members queried how the Board was specifically working to tackle neglect. In response it was advised that the Board was challenging partners on their identification and prevention procedures. For neglect this included assessing if agencies gave sufficient consideration to neglect when making interventions on related factors, such as domestic abuse and substance abuse.
- The Committee queried why multi-agency safeguarding training was not consistently delivered in all settings. In response, it was advised that a great deal of single-agency training had been delivered, however there were difficulties in arranging multi-agency training. Multi-agency training was preferential as it promoted joint-working and gave staff an opportunity to consider safeguarding from a different perspective. For example, it was noted that front line police officers did not regularly interact with health workers and those working in children's services. The ISCB would continue to evaluate the effectiveness of training and emphasise its importance.
- It was queried if the 41% increase in high risk abuse cases being referred to MARAC was positive or negative. In response, it was advised that abuse was generally under-reported so an increase in referrals was considered positive.
- Following a query, it was advised that Moorfields NHS Trust featured significantly in the report as they had substantial engagement with the ISCB.
- The Committee noted the impact of the neglect toolkit, which had helped with the identification and awareness of neglect issues in universal services.
- In response to a query about where unaccompanied asylum seeking children presented themselves to the council, it was advised that some approached the council through a solicitor, whereas others were identified through council services or local community groups.
- The Committee queried the reasons for the increase in homeless young people. In response, it was advised that some families with disruptive or

offending 16 and 17 year olds were making their children homeless, and since the Southwark Judgement in 2009, children's services were required to provide accommodation and care services to these young people. It was clarified that previously the authority would have provided housing, but these young people would not be considered 'looked after children' and therefore would not be entitled to access to certain services and benefits.

- It was noted that emotional abuse and neglect had a higher prevalence than child sexual exploitation, however sexual exploitation was more prominently featured as a concern in the media. It was queried how this shaped the priorities of the Board. In response, it was advised that different types of abuse were identified through different channels and the Board had to maintain a focus on all areas. For example, neglect and emotional abuse was often associated with domestic violence and substance abuse and instances could be identified by agencies working with families on those issues, however sexual exploitation tended to be identified by social workers developing child protection plans.
- Following a query, it was advised that the increase in the number of child protection plans had brought Islington in line with its statistical neighbours.
- A discussion was had on how complaints against staff working with children were processed. It was advised that there was initial concern about health partners not making referrals for consideration by the LADO, however it was found that a parallel process was in place and agencies were found to be compliant.
- Following a question by a member of the public, it was queried why the report did not focus on radicalisation and extremism. In response, it was noted that this had been a priority more recently and guidance was being prepared for parents and carers.
- Following a question by a member of the public, it was advised that the ISCB included BME members. The report did not include BME data as, although partners recorded demographic information, due to the few numbers of referrals the data was not statistically significant.
- A member of the public queried how deaf children and those with other communication difficulties were effectively safeguarded, how these children could communicate their concerns to agencies, and if local services with safeguarding responsibilities had sufficient access to BSL interpreters. In response it was advised that the council did have a service for children with disabilities. It was requested that further information be circulated to the Committee.

The Committee thanked Alan Caton for his attendance.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Islington Safeguarding Board Annual Report and recommendations of the Board be noted;
- 2) That concerns about the engagement of the CPS in local safeguarding activity be noted; and
- 3) That further information on the safeguarding of children with disabilities be circulated to the Committee.

96

ALTERNATIVE PROVISION: WITNESS EVIDENCE (ITEM NO. B2)

The Committee received witness evidence from Sarah Bealey of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School on pupil outcomes and accountability and the policies and practices of schools.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

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- The view of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School was that the quality and range of alternative provision had improved in recent years. There were a greater number of options available, although it was noted that some of those were further outside of the borough.
- The Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School was acutely aware of their accountability for pupils on alternative provision and had an active role in monitoring pupil progress and the quality of providers.
- The school was keen to work with providers to improve the quality of their teaching. It was explained that some providers provided quality vocational courses however found teaching a core English and Maths curriculum to be challenging. Providers had been invited into the school to observe lessons. The school considered such partnership working to be very important.
- The school considered alternative provision to be good value. Although alternative provision was only used as a last resort, the school appreciated that for a minority of pupils who struggled with mainstream education it was essential.
- The average pupil referred to alternative provision from the school was white British and had a multitude of issues. The smaller, more nurturing environment available in alternative provision was praised. It was commented that schools did not have the resources or capacity to provide this environment and without alternative provision there would likely be an increase in exclusions.
- Whilst it was recognised that not all pupils achieved positive outcomes, it was commented that alternative provision was central to improving the outcomes for some pupils. An example of a former Elizabeth Garrett Anderson pupil progressing from alternative provision to university was given.
- The experience of the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School was that alternative provision was most effective for pupils at risk of exclusion, those who were disengaged from education, who were not attending school regularly, or were from dysfunctional families. It was commented that these pupils often benefitted from engagement with Early Help services.
- A worry was expressed that a number of pupils entering alternative provision had been mid-phase admissions to schools. It was commented that moving schools during GCSE studies was often difficult for pupils and additional support was needed to make such transfers work.
- The school considered the academic quality of providers to be very important. Although pupils on alternative provision often required additional educational support, some pupils had strong academic abilities and the potential to attend university. It was important to challenge pupils to ensure that they were able to re-engage with education later in life.
- It was queried if pupils admitted to schools mid-phase or through the Fair Access Protocol were placed on alternative provision as a method of easing the burden on schools to integrate potentially difficult pupils. In response, it was advised that this was not the case at the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School. The council's alternative provision service challenged schools on referrals and schools were required to evidence what they had done to keep pupils in mainstream education. Given the difficulties often faced by pupils on alternative provision, referrals to IFIT or Families First were usually made before a referral to alternative provision.
- Officers advised that some Year 11 pupils admitted to schools mid-phase in the past had been referred to alternative provision. It was suggested that pupils who had been working to a different GCSE syllabus previously were not likely to pass their GCSEs if admitted late in the academic year.
- It was commented that the Secure in Education Board had strong safeguarding mechanisms and an independent chair. Schools receiving pupils though the Board were expected to do everything possible to keep the pupil in

mainstream education and an automatic referral to alternative provision would not be acceptable in most cases.

- Officers advised that the alternative provision team maintained a good working relationship with the two academy schools in the borough, although one did limit the providers they would use.
- The Committee noted concerns about 'school hopping' pupils. It was explained that some pupils moved schools and between local authority areas to avoid exclusion and family intervention. Sometimes these pupils had come from challenging backgrounds but this was not immediately apparent to schools and local agencies. It was suggested that better outcomes could be achieved if schools were more honest with each other when transferring pupils.
- The Committee queried how alternative provision could be considered good value when outcomes were often poor. In response, it was advised that alternative provision was used as a last resort when a school had tried everything to re-engage the pupil in education. Often the relationship between the school and pupil had broken down. Whilst it was recognised that outcomes were often poor, alternative provision gave these pupils a chance to succeed that they would not have otherwise.
- It was suggested that the successes of schools and alternative provision providers should be assessed differently. Although pupils in alternative provision were not as likely to achieve strong academic outcomes, re-integration into the education system could be considered a success for some pupils, regardless of their academic performance. Given the personal difficulties that alternative provision pupils often faced, significant improvements in attendance were often considered a success.
- Following a question about the proportion of BME pupils on alternative provision, it was advised that the vast majority from the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School were from white British backgrounds. It was advised that the school was working with pupils to raise aspirations and instil positive work ethics. The school had organised mother and daughter university visits and held literacy and numeracy classes for parents.
- The Committee queried if the school had experienced any problems with providers in the past. It was commented that some providers did not have high enough aspirations for their pupils; however, schools were able to raise such concerns with the council. There were instances of the council ceasing to place pupils with providers that did not meet expected standards.
- It was queried if providers had access to counsellors to help pupils with behavioural and emotional needs. In response, it was advised that this varied depending on the provider; however the council and schools sought to place pupils with providers that were appropriate for their needs. Pupils in need of such support would be placed at a provider with a nurturing environment; it was commented that one such Elizabeth Garrett Anderson pupil had been placed at Hackney City Farm and achieved good outcomes. However, some pupils preferred college-style education and were placed with providers that could provide this setting.
- The Committee queried what the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School would do to support pupils currently sent to alternative provision if it had greater capacity and resources. In response, it was advised that the school would teach these pupils in smaller classes and regularly take them out of school for educational activities.
- A member of the public commented on the council's intention to reduce the number of pupils placed in alternative provision and queried the possible impact of schools having to retain pupils that would otherwise be referred to alternative provision. In response, it was stated that Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School referred few pupils to alternative provision so there would only be a limited impact.

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- In response to a question from a member of the public, it was advised that providers became responsible for pupil premium funding, however they had to justify any spend before monies were transferred. It was reported that some providers had spent the funding on activities for their pupils, whereas others had spent the funding on technology such as laptops.
- Following a query from a member of the public, it was advised that alternative provision pupils had a wide range of vulnerabilities and providers were required to follow the national curriculum for core subjects.
- The Committee queried why the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson School had a low number of referrals in comparison to other schools. In response, it was advised that the school had a "never give up" attitude and cared deeply for all of its pupils. The school sought to be as creative and flexible as possible when dealing with difficult pupils and, where possible, would tailor the curriculum to their interests and needs to keep them engaged. Examples were given of pupils doing a different activity one afternoon a week, or coming in late on certain mornings and finishing later in the day. Some pupils were permitted to drop a school subject and focus on social skills instead. The school sought to foster a culture where every pupil felt valued and cared for; it was suggested that this made pupils want to attend school and developed pupils' belief that they could succeed.

The Committee thanked Sarah Bealey for her attendance.

97 **IMPACT OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY (SEND) CHANGES ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (ITEM NO. B3)**

RESOLVED:

That consideration of the item be deferred to the May 2016 meeting.

98 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. B4)**

Councillor Joe Caluori, Executive Member for Children and Families, provided an update to the Committee on his recent work. The Committee questioned the Executive Member on the following topics:

- Councillor Wayne queried if the recent inspection of the youth offending service represented a fair evaluation of the service and what the council would be doing to make the required improvements identified by the inspector. In response, it was advised that the conclusions of the report were fair and the council would be working to improve its relationship with the police as a result. In particular, the council and police needed to be more direct with each other about local issues. The co-location of the police and youth offending service would contribute to this, as would greater information sharing. It was hoped that a better relationship with the police would lead to more comprehensive intelligence on youth offenders.
- Councillor Wayne asked a supplementary question on the council's relationship with the new Borough Commander. Councillor Caluori advised that the Borough Commander had been in post for around six months and was willing to work with the council on youth offending. Councillor Caluori also emphasised the importance of working with schools, as they had regular contact with pupils and parents and were a good source of information.
- The Chair commented on the great work of Cathy Blair, the Director of Targeted and Specialist Children's Services, who was to retire at the end of February. In response to a query about the recruitment of a new director, it was advised that further information would be circulated outside of the meeting. The Committee resolved that their thanks to Cathy Blair be noted.

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- The Chair asked for further information on the council's selection by the government as a 'Practice Leader' for child protection social work. Councillor Caluori advised that the council was considered to be a pioneering authority and had been granted £2million to make further social work innovations. This was intended to set a path for other authorities to follow. Officers would be presenting their work to other local authorities.
- A member of the public asked about the impact of individual elector registration on young people. It was queried how many 16 to 19 year olds had dropped off the electoral register and what the council was doing to encourage registration. Councillor Caluori advised that he did not have information to hand however a response could be provided outside of the meeting.
- A member of the public asked about school class sizes and if there was a school places crisis in Islington. In response, it was advised that one new school was due to open in future, the City of London Primary Academy, however there were no current plans to open other new schools and any population increase was expected to be counteracted by expanding existing good and outstanding schools. Councillor Caluori further explained that Islington did not have a school places crisis; however there was some uneven distribution of schools in the borough, with some schools over capacity and others with over-supply. As a result the council had changed its geographic planning areas so developers would need to give greater consideration to local school provision when planning new developments. Councillor Caluori appreciated that the GLA predicted a future shortfall in school places in Islington, however it was explained that these figures were partially based on the number of new properties and it was known that up to 40% of new properties in the south of the borough were vacant. In addition, it was thought that the changing wealth profile of residents living in new developments may mean that future borough residents have a lesser demand for state education.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee's thanks to Cathy Blair for her contribution to the council's children's services be noted.

99

REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B5)

The Committee requested further information to assist the Alternative Provision review. In particular, information was requested on school referring numbers, demographic information, pupils admitted mid-term or under the Fair Access Protocol, outcomes and performance data, "life chances" and destinations for those on alternative provision, what schools do before referring pupils to alternative provision, a list of providers and courses, and attendance statistics.

Officers advised that a plan for providing this information would be reported to the next meeting.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.30 pm

Chair