

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 10 July 2017

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Monday 10 July 2017 at 7.00 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Debono (Chair), Ismail, Ngongo and Spall

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

Councillor Theresa Debono in the Chair

225 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)

Apologies for absence were received from Erol Baduna and Councillors Gallagher and Wayne.

226 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A2)

None.

227 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A3)

None.

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

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

229 CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)

The Chair advised that Children's Services had undergone an Ofsted inspection in May 2017. The Chair and Vice-Chair had been interviewed by the inspectors. The results of the inspection would be published on Friday 14th July 2017.

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

None.

231 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)

A group of local parents highlighted the proposed closure of Paradise Park Children's Centre Café. The café was managed by Islington Play Association and funded by Islington Council, however as council was to bring some services back in house, the funding to Islington Play Association would decrease and the café service would close

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as a result. Although the play sessions held at the centre would be relocated, the parents contested that the café service was a unique, welcoming and affordable space which provided support to a diverse range of parents. The parents had identified a £45,000 shortfall in funding for the café and asked if the council would commit to continue to fund the service.

The Corporate Director of Children's Services advised that discussions around the future of the café were ongoing and she hoped that a solution could be found. The Corporate Director offered to correspond with the parents outside of the meeting. Councillor Rakhia Ismail advised that she was a local ward councillor for Paradise Park and commented that she would be keen to attend a meeting with officers on this matter.

The Committee requested that an update on this matter be reported to a future meeting.

232 MEMBERSHIP, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND DATES OF MEETINGS (ITEM NO. B1)

RESOLVED:

That the membership, terms of reference and dates of meetings of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2017/18 be noted.

233 POST-16 EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING - DRAFT REPORT (ITEM NO. B2)

The Committee considered the draft report of its review of Post-16 Education, Employment and Training.

It was agreed that the report be amended to propose that schools should appoint a governor with *sole responsibility* for overseeing their school's careers offer. It was thought that if this responsibility was added to a governor's existing responsibilities then this important work may not be prioritised.

It was agreed to include an additional recommendation to propose that schools make use of alumni groups to support their careers offer. It was commented that this could provide young people with access to networks, sector specific knowledge, and may identify role models for young people.

It was agreed that amendments be made to the body of the report to emphasise the importance of normalising vocational pathways, accessing support services, and having 'back up plans'. Whilst information on these topics was already available to young people, it was thought that a more holistic approach would improve take-up.

The Committee thanked officers for their work in supporting the review.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the report of the Committee's review into Post-16 Education, Employment and Training be agreed, subject to the following amendments:
 - a. an amendment to propose that schools should appoint a governor with sole responsibility for overseeing their school's careers offer;

- b. an additional recommendation and supporting analysis to propose that schools make use of alumni groups to support their careers offer;
 - c. amendments to the body of the report to emphasise the importance of normalising vocational pathways, accessing support services, and having 'back up plans';
- (ii) That the amended report be submitted to the Executive.

234 EDUCATION IN ISLINGTON - ANNUAL REPORT (ITEM NO. B3)

Mark Taylor, Director of Learning and Schools, and Lauren Pang, Head of Information and Performance, introduced the report which summarised educational performance in 2016.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- 2016 had been a year of significant change. A new primary curriculum had been introduced, and a new accountability framework had been introduced at secondary level.
- The quality of educational provision in Islington was high. 96% of primary schools were rated 'outstanding', although there had been a slight decrease in the quality of secondary provision following Highbury Grove School being rated as Inadequate.
- Islington had narrowly missed the top quartile for pupils reaching the expected standard in combined reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 2.
- Officers explained the new Progress 8 measure, which assessed the progress of pupils relative to their peers, measuring their outcomes at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. Islington was ranked 18th nationally for this new measure, above Inner London and National averages.
- Officers commented there was further room for improvement on the Attainment 8 score, which was above the national average, but below the Inner London average.
- It was welcomed that there had been further reductions in the number of young people NEET or in Alternative Provision.
- Officers highlighted that average Progress 8 scores varied by ethnicity. Work was underway to analyse this and then roll out the techniques used by the highest performing schools.
- Persistent absence remained a challenge. It was commented that persistent absentees often displayed other challenging behaviour.
- Discussions were underway on how to further develop the Community of Schools. The schools were considering establishing a more formal governance structure which would strengthen the group, however it was not intended to increase bureaucracy.
- James Stephenson commented that he had attended the local education equalities conference 'Closing the Gap'. It was reported that this was an interesting and productive session, however it was felt that discussions were focussed on parents and communities, and the conference would have benefitted from a stronger emphasis on the views and experiences of young people.
- A member of the public suggested that school absences could be a result of bullying. Officers advised that this could be a factor in some instances, however there were a range of reasons why some young people disengaged from education.
- A member of the Committee advised that she knew of local families whose children did not want to attend school due to islamophobic bullying. Officers

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advised that schools took islamophobia very seriously; however acknowledged that some schools needed to improve their complaint management processes and communicate more effectively with parents.

- A member of the public provided an example of a child with special educational needs who was struggling in mainstream school. It was suggested that the child would be better supported at The Bridge Special School, however there were not sufficient places. Officers acknowledged that spaces at The Bridge were limited, however advised that The Bridge would be operating satellite provision at some mainstream schools from September 2017.
- The Committee considered the significant differences between the attainment of different ethnic groups. It was commented that this needed addressing with some urgency otherwise there would be a longer term effect on society. Members of the Committee highlighted that booster classes and special projects were previously provided for pupils from certain ethnic backgrounds, and it was suggested that reintroducing such schemes would help to raise attainment.
- It was welcomed that Islington pupils made good progress, however it was suggested that Islington pupils may have a lower starting point than pupils in more affluent areas.
- The Committee considered the challenges faced by children looked after and expressed their concern at the significant attainment gap between looked after children and the mainstream cohort.
- Whilst the achievements in pupil progress and GCSE attainment were welcomed, it was commented that further work was needed to improve performance at the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 5.
- A member of the public queried why primary school attainment was below the Inner London average. In response, officers advised that schools in Inner London had very high levels of attainment and whilst the council aspired for Islington schools to achieve the same level, this was a challenge. It was noted that primary attainment in Islington had improved over recent years.
- A member of the public commented on why the number of primary school exclusions was so high. In response, officers acknowledged that this was a concern, and suggested that the pressures on finances and resources and the increased focus on performance in recent years may have contributed to decisions to exclude pupils. The council was engaging with head teachers on this issue.
- The Committee noted that, whilst some London boroughs had lower NEET rates than Islington, they also had a much higher percentage of pupils whose destination was unknown. It was queried if Islington was more diligent at collecting the destinations data of young people than other boroughs. Officers could not comment on the activities of other boroughs, however indicated that local authorities would be required to report their NEET and unknown rates in future.

The Committee thanked the officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED:

- i) That recent changes to curriculum, examination and assessment arrangements be noted;
- ii) That the key strategic priority to further develop the Islington Community of Schools be noted.

235 UPDATE ON TRENDS AND DEMAND FOR PLACES AT ISLINGTON SCHOOLS
(ITEM NO. B4)

Mark Taylor, Director of Learning and Schools, and Lauren Pang, Head of Information and Performance, introduced the report which set out the demand for school places and roll projections up to 2030/31.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- School place planning was a delicate balancing act. It was important to ensure that there were sufficient places to give parents choice, however schools which were undersubscribed often faced financial challenges. It was therefore important to expand the right schools at the right time to carefully control the supply of spaces.
- It was reported that the population growth figures set out in the report were based on projections from the Greater London Authority.
- The borough had sufficient capacity in its schools, however spaces in the Canonbury and Holloway areas were more limited.
- It was reported that the council had a good relationship with the Education and Skills Funding Agency, which financed school expansions.
- The Committee queried the borough's relationship with the Dame Alice Owen's School in Potters Bar, in particular its admission arrangements, and what percentage of its pupils from Islington were from BME backgrounds or were eligible for free school meals. The Committee requested that a briefing on these matters be circulated.

The Committee thanked the officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the report be noted;
- (ii) That a briefing on admissions to the Dame Alice Owen's School be circulated to members of the Committee.

236 QUARTERLY REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE (Q4 2016/17)
(ITEM NO. B5)

Carmel Littleton, Corporate Director of Children's Services, and Finola Culbert, Director of Targeted and Specialist Children and Families Services, introduced the report which summarised Children's Services performance in quarter 4 2016/17.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Re-referrals to social care had increased, but were still below the national average. It was thought that this increase was due to an increased focus on safeguarding 16 to 18 year olds.
- The number of children reported as missing from home had increased, however it was thought that this was due to the introduction of stronger reporting systems.
- Following a question, it was advised that most missing children returned home, at which point they were interviewed by the police and the council's Targeted Youth Service. The risks to these young people were assessed and on occasion follow up action was taken.

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- Young people missing from home were more likely to be victims of child sexual exploitation, neglect, domestic violence, and be involved in gang violence. The Committee expressed concern for these young people noted that they were also more likely to be excluded from school.
- A member of the public queried the lack of progress on increasing the number of active childminders and the percentage of 2 year old places taken up by low income families, children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, or who are looked after. In response it was advised that both of these areas were challenging, and further detail would be provided in a future report.
- Following a question on the number of young people in residential care, it was advised that residential care was only used as a last resort, and around 20 young people were currently placed in such settings. The council only used provision which was rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, and the council was alerted very quickly to any safeguarding concerns.
- A member of the public queried the council's approach to working with care leavers. In response, it was advised that care leavers were supported until the age of 21, or 25 if they were in further education. However, this was due to change, and all care leavers would be supported until age 25 from September 2017. All care leavers were provided with housing if they were ready to manage a tenancy on their own, and these young people received ongoing support. As a result, no care leaver had a breakdown in tenancy in the previous year.

The Committee thanked officers for their attendance.

RESOLVED:

- i) That Children's Services performance in Quarter 4 2016/17 be noted;
- ii) That the proposed changes to Children's Services corporate performance indicators be noted.

237 SCRUTINY TOPICS AND WORK PROGRAMME 2017-18 (ITEM NO. B6)

The Committee considered its work plan for 2017/18.

It was requested that the Committee receive a report on bullying and discrimination in Islington schools.

The Committee agreed to consider its scrutiny topics outside of the meeting. It was suggested that the Committee could review 'the child's voice' and how the views and experiences of young people were taken into account when planning and delivering children's services.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the work plan for 2017/18 be agreed, subject to the inclusion of an item on bullying and discrimination in Islington schools;
- ii) That the decision to select a scrutiny topic for 2017/18 be delegated to the Chair in consultation with other members of the Committee.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.10 pm

Chair