

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Thursday, 13 September 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD - Islington Town Hall on Thursday, 13 September 2018 at 7.00 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Debono (Chair), Cutler (Vice-Chair), Ismail, Ngongo, Spall, Woolf and Woodbyrne

Co-opted Member: Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese

Councillor Theresa Debono in the Chair

- 24 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)**
Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bell-Bradford and Spall.
- 25 **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A2)**
None.
- 26 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A3)**
None.
- 27 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. A4)**
It was agreed to delete the words 'who considered exclusion to be a 'badge of honour'' at Minute 20(b).

It was requested that the local labour market analysis referenced in Minute 21 be circulated to members of the Committee.

It was agreed to insert an additional point at Minute 21, as follows:

- A member noted that the scope of the Committee's review of Post-16 Education, Employment and Training did not include evidence from school sixth forms and colleges - the main providers of post-16 education – in respect of their role in developing pathways for young people and supporting them into employment. It was suggested that this may be an area suitable for further scrutiny in future. Following the meeting, it was advised that officers were due to commission a Local Skills Strategy that would assess the role of sixth forms and colleges and may be a useful reference for future work, should the Committee decide to revisit the topic.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2018 be agreed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them, subject to the following amendments:

- (i) To delete the words '*who considered exclusion to be a 'badge of honour''*' at Minute 20(b); and
- (ii) To insert the words '*A member noted that the scope of the Committee's review of Post-16 Education, Employment and Training did not include evidence from school sixth forms and colleges - the main providers of post-16 education – in respect of their role in developing pathways for young people and supporting them into employment. It was suggested that this may be an area suitable for further scrutiny in future. Following the meeting, it was advised that officers were due to commission a Local Skills Strategy that would assess the role of sixth forms and colleges and may be a useful reference for future work, should the Committee decide to revisit the topic.*' at Minute 21.

28 CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)

The Chair advised that Osama Al-Jayousi, the Primary Parent Governor Representative, had stepped down from the Committee.

The Chair noted that members of the Committee had been invited to attend a workshop on scrutinising school performance data.

It was noted that a glossary of key terms had been circulated to members of the Committee. It was agreed that this would be a live document and updated as required.

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

None.

30 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)

None.

31 PERMANENT AND FIXED PERIOD EXCLUSION FROM SCHOOL - WITNESS EVIDENCE (ITEM NO. B1)

- a) Gill Sassienie – Principal Educational Psychologist

The Committee received a presentation from Gill Sassienie, Principal Educational Psychologist.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

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- The educational psychology service took a 'whole school approach; working with school leadership, teachers, families, children, and on school systems and processes.
- The service was comprised of 11.7 FTE staff. This was occasionally supplemented by trainees from local universities.
- The service provided a core service funded by the local authority and an additional traded service which schools could choose to purchase. Statutory work included assessments of children at risk of exclusion, those with complex needs, and children who were vulnerable (i.e. looked after children, or young people engaging with the Youth Offending Service). Traded services included consultations and assessments for students with SEND, workforce development, policy development, and direct interventions with pupils.
- One of the service's biggest challenges was funding; as the demand for statutory services was increasing, the service was not able to offer as much early intervention and discretionary work as officers would like.
- Only 5 of the 32 permanently excluded pupils in 2017-18 had been in contact with the educational psychology service; two of those had not been involved recently and a further two had only accessed the service after their exclusion. Although this limited involvement could suggest that the service was effective at preventing pupils from being excluded, officers thought that they should be involved in more cases, and considered that some schools did not refer pupils at risk of exclusion for educational psychology often enough, or at an early enough stage.
- Officers commented that some schools bought a lot of discretionary services from the Educational Psychology Service, whereas others either did not have the available funding, or did not consider educational psychology to be a priority for its pupils.
- Referrals to the service had increased recently, and officers hoped that this would help to prevent exclusions.
- Officers emphasised the importance of early intervention. The Educational Psychology Service considered that pupils engaging with its services were less likely to be excluded, and if they had to move placement it would be managed more carefully.
- The service offered both support and challenge to schools. Sometimes it was necessary to challenge schools on their processes and decisions, however as a traded service purchased by schools, the service had to be constructive in its criticism.
- The service met with school leaders on a termly basis. This meeting would consider a range of matters, including the latest exclusions data.
- Educational psychology assessed young people holistically, evaluating their strengths and weaknesses, to determine why young people exhibited certain behaviours. Psychologists then created a hypothesis and made recommendations for schools and young people to implement strategies to help them cope in school. For pupils, this sometimes resulted in practical changes, for example not sitting in assembly for so long, or working in a different way.
- Officers acknowledged that implementing different strategies for pupils could be difficult for teachers, and explained that the educational

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psychology service worked with teachers to support them in implementing embedding different approaches.

- Officers commented that it was helpful for teaching staff to have a basic understanding of adolescent psychology as this helped them to recognise and understand their pupils' behaviours.
- The Educational Psychology Service helped to support staff wellbeing; the service offered staff supervision and this service was valued by schools. The service sought to give teachers the capacity to de-escalate situations in their classroom.
- The service worked with head teachers on school ethos; it was explained that schools which had a nurturing ethos and involved parents in their work tended to exclude fewer pupils than schools that had a stronger focus on enforcing school rules.
- Some permanently excluded pupils were later diagnosed as having special educational needs and issued with an EHCP. It was suggested that earlier diagnosis would result in these pupils receiving the support they needed to stay in mainstream education.
- Research suggested that schools with lower rates of exclusion reported higher rates of staff wellbeing.
- Officers reported that, in their experience, pupils at New River College felt a sense of belonging and that they had positive relationships with staff.
- The Education Psychology Service suggested that the number of exclusions could be reduced by schools adopting a more nurturing approach. It was also suggested that parenting classes could help parents to support children with behavioural issues more effectively. However, it was recognised that some schools and parents did not want to change, and the challenge would be convincing schools and parents that change can be beneficial.
- A member of the Committee commented that, due to the limited funding available to schools for procuring additional pupil support services, some schools prioritised resources on support for children with significant special educational needs and learning difficulties over those with emotional and social needs. The Committee understood that schools faced difficult decisions on how to allocate their very limited funding, however it was also noted that pupils with emotional and social needs tended to have behavioural difficulties which could put them at risk of exclusion.
- The Committee queried how many young carers had been excluded or were at risk of exclusion. Although figures were not available, it was noted that young carers may be vulnerable and struggle to fully engage in education.
- A member queried if the schools which did not buy discretionary Educational Psychology services tended to have higher rates of exclusion. In response, it was advised that the highest excluding secondary schools did not buy many discretionary educational psychology services, however the position with primary schools was more mixed. The highest excluding primary school did buy discretionary educational psychology services.

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- The Educational Psychology Service was concerned that some exclusions appeared to be avoidable, and suggested that a lack of support and training on managing behavioural issues was contributing to the borough's exclusion rate. Officers suggested that developing the skills of school staff was a sustainable way of managing behaviour, however also noted that schools with high rates of staff turnover would have difficulties in embedding strategies to support pupils at risk of exclusion.
- A member noted that many parents supported schools in adopting zero tolerance approaches to behaviour, as they did not want their child's learning to be disrupted by other pupils. It was queried how schools could be inclusive whilst also having a strong focus on behaviour. In response, the Educational Psychology Service appreciated the importance of consistency, however also thought that schools should allow a level of flexibility in their behaviour policies for vulnerable pupils at risk of exclusion.
- The Committee noted the pressures on schools from parents, government targets and Ofsted. It was understandable why schools would want to adopt strong a behaviour management policy in that context.
- In response to a question on why so few excluded pupils had accessed the Educational Psychology Service, it was commented that schools tended to separate support services from behaviour management pathways; they were often managed by different staff with different priorities. Officers thought that greater join-up between support services and behaviour management practices would result in more holistic support for pupils at risk of exclusion.
- Islington Council did not provide a behaviour support service to schools. New River College had an outreach team which was available to schools, however this was a small team with limited resources. Officers considered that, on the whole, schools managed behaviour effectively.
- Officers emphasised that Islington offered a range of comprehensive support services to schools which were not available in other areas.
- Following a question from a member of the public, officers commented on the importance of supporting excluded pupils and ensuring that they are placed in a welcoming environment in which they have opportunities to progress.

b) Ruth Beecher – Head of Early Help Services

The Chair noted that Abi Onaboye, Head of Strategy, Policy and Commissioning, was unavailable and that the evidence would be presented by Ruth Beecher, Head of Early Help Services.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Early Help services worked with schools, council services and partners to help children and families needing additional support.

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- Some families had problems which had been entrenched for generations; these families had complex needs and needed significant levels of support. Early Help was an approach to supporting families which sought to address problems at an early stage before they become entrenched.
- Early Help approaches were beneficial as they resulted in better outcomes for families and less expenditure on specialist services by local authorities.
- Early Help services worked with schools to support young people at risk of exclusion and their families. Early Help services also supported parents of young people with challenging behaviours, including those who were persistently absent.
- Families First was an open-access service which families could approach for support on any matter without stigma. Families sometimes needed help engaging with schools on issues related to their child's education.
- Islington Families Intensive Team (IFIT) provided more concentrated support to families with more entrenched issues, but who did not necessarily meet the threshold for statutory services.
- Early Help services provided a range of support to families; it was explained that some families needed a referral to a specialist service (e.g. CAMHS) whereas others simply needed a trusted person to talk through their problems with and to provide advice. The services sought to take a positive approach and focus on a family's strengths, rather than their weaknesses.
- Some parents had a poor relationship with their child's school; this could sometimes be a historic issue if parents did not have a positive relationship with their own school.
- An Early Help worker was linked to every school; the service was present at parent evenings to engage with families and occasionally held coffee mornings for parents.
- A recent survey found that 92% of safeguarding leads in the borough knew about the council's Early Help services.
- The Committee considered case studies of families engaging with Early Help services, and noted how the work of the service could help a family achieve positive outcomes.
- Officers working in the council's Early Help services did not believe that fixed term exclusion helped young people to change their behaviour. Officers considered that engagement with support services and implementing interventions was far more effective.
- Officers commented that some pupils at risk of exclusion had undiagnosed special educational needs.
- Officers explained that it was challenging for Early Help services to work across schools which had very different behaviour policies. Different rules at different schools made it difficult to give parents consistent and helpful advice, and some parents queried why some behaviours were punished more severely in some schools than others.
- Whereas social workers focused on immediate risks to the family; Early Help services could take a wider focus on behaviour, school attendance,

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and other issues which did not meet the threshold for statutory intervention.

- Officers highlighted that many excluded pupils had been victims of or witnessed domestic violence. The council had recently received funding to trial a new approach to supporting families experiencing domestic violence; this involved greater partnership work with the Police, schools, and social workers.
- c) Dr Helen Aspland & Jane Stephenson-Glynn – Child and Adolescents Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

The Committee received a presentation from Dr Helen Aspland, Clinical Psychologist Lead for CAMHS in Schools and Pupil Referral Units, and Jane Stephenson-Glynn, Children's Health Commissioning Manager.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- CAMHS was a multidisciplinary service with representation from a range of psychologists and psychotherapists. All primary schools had access to a CAMHS worker for half a day a fortnight for 5/6 half terms, and all secondary schools had access to a CAMHS worker for a day a week for 5/6 half terms. This core provision was funded by the Islington Schools Forum.
- In addition to the core provision, schools could buy in additional CAMHS services. 6 secondary schools and 12 primary schools in the borough had an SLA with CAMHS. Provision was also available to the New River College PRU.
- CAMHS offered a wide range of support to both young people and school staff. The service provided direct assessment and intervention with young people, as well as support to staff, workshops with parents, and training.
- Some schools were making use of consultation and using CAMHS to help train staff and develop their practices. It was thought that this was an increasingly attractive offer to schools given the lack of funding available for direct intervention.
- CAMHS staff were passionate about taking a 'whole school approach' which involved working with schools, public health and school improvement officers to develop trauma informed practices in schools. Officers commented that this had a real impact on how schools work with young people and helped to promote wellbeing and resilience.
- Officers commented that families were often referred to CAMHS when a child was on the cusp of exclusion; this was sometimes too late, and it was thought that earlier referral would result in more positive outcomes for young people.
- Officers thought that pupils could be referred to CAMHS earlier. Whilst some young people exhibited very challenging behaviour, their behaviour was also predictable, and it was suggested that further work was required to encourage schools to make referrals at an earlier stage.

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- CAMHS officers wanted schools to keep an open mind about what was driving behavioural issues in young people, and make referrals as required.
- CAMHS officers commented that the way in which some schools and teachers manage behaviour can be triggering to young people with mental health issues. It was explained that dealing with poor behaviour in a way that lacks empathy can escalate situations in the classroom. CAMHS wanted to help teachers to manage behaviour in a way that would diffuse tensions.
- Following a question on the training available to school staff, it was advised that a range of training was offered to schools, however CAMHS officers had noticed that the same staff routinely attended their sessions. It was suggested that it would be beneficial for a wider range of school staff to attend the training on offer.
- The Committee welcomed that the CAMHS service also supported the wellbeing of teaching staff, commenting that it was important for teachers to be supported in dealing with disruptive and challenging pupils.
- It was suggested that the reduction in school resources, particularly through the loss of teaching assistants, had a significant impact on support available to pupils.
- The Committee considered the impact of exclusion on pupils and their families. Excluded pupils were vulnerable to exploitation. Exclusion could also put significant pressure on parent-child relationships and staying at home with excluded pupils could put a parent's employment at risk. It was emphasised that mainstream school was the best setting for the vast majority of pupils.
- CAMHS officers suggested how support for pupils at risk of exclusion could be improved. It was suggested that more sophisticated data sharing arrangements, developed with due regard to Data Protection requirements, would help school staff to understand the needs of young people. CAMHS officers advised that some areas had adopted 'pyramid of need' approaches, where a young person's needs were categorised without explicit reference to their individual circumstances. This allowed a wide range of school staff to be aware of a young person's needs and how best to support them, without having details of their personal circumstances.
- Following a question, it was advised that some young people had benefitted from art therapy, as well as cultural, leisure and sporting activities focused on promoting wellbeing.
- A member noted that excluded young people attending pupil referral units tended to achieve poor outcomes, and asked if anything could be done to improve outcomes for those already excluded. In response, it was advised that comprehensive support was available to pupils at the New River College PRU, however excluded pupils faced considerable challenges.
- A member advised that she was impressed with the provision available at New River College, commenting that the level of support available to young people was commendable. Following a query on exposure to

Adverse Childhood Experiences, it was commented that a good explanation of how such experiences affected young people mentally and physically was available in a TED Talk from Nadine Burke Harris; and it was agreed that this would be circulated to the Committee.

- d) Briefing note: Government review of pupil exclusion, and a statement on alternative provision

Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services, introduced the briefing note, which summarised the latest progress on the Government review of pupil exclusion, and related matters.

A member queried how the council could challenge schools on exclusion matters. In response, it was advised that officers regularly met with headteachers and governors on a range of matters and exclusion could be discussed in those meetings. Although the council did not have a formal role in supporting academies, issues around exclusion could be taken up with the relevant academy trust or the Regional Schools Coordinator. However, it was emphasised that there was no mechanism for the council to formally challenge the performance of academies.

Officers expressed caution on developing borough-wide strategies on exclusion when the majority of exclusions were attributed to only a small number of schools. It was suggested that it would be better to develop the support on offer to those schools and work intensively with them on introducing an ethos and culture in which both pupils and teachers were supported and focused on managing behaviour.

The Committee thanked officers for their attendance.

32 **SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (ITEM NO. B2)**

Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services, presented to the Committee on the support available for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Officers emphasised the importance distinguishing between low levels of achievement and SEND. Similarly, children with English as a second language could not be considered to have a learning difficulty solely because of their language skills.
- Children with SEND could be broadly categorised as having four distinct areas of need: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social, emotional and mental health; and physical and sensory needs. Islington's local offer was focused around meeting those needs.

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- Officers explained that the borough's special schools were focused on supporting children with different areas of need; and officers considered that Islington provided a good local offer for a small borough.
- The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced reforms which changed the way in which children with SEND are supported. Young people with SEND were assessed to allow an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to be developed. This was an outcome focused, personalised plan which detailed how a young person should be supported.
- Around 3.9% of Islington's young people were eligible for an EHCP. This was above the London and England average of 2.1%. More boys than girls were eligible for an EHCP, compared to the national profile.
- A new Ofsted and Care Quality Commission inspection regime had been introduced in recent years. Islington had not yet been inspected, however an inspection was anticipated in the near future.
- The Committee considered the profile of Islington's young people with SEND, and the outcomes of local young people with SEND in comparison to other local authorities. Although pupils with and EHCP and accessing SEND support achieved a good level of development in Early Years provision and tended to achieve a good level of attainment at Key Stage 2, further work was needed to improve the attainment of pupils with an EHCP at Key Stage 4.
- Islington pupils with an EHCP had achieved good levels of attainment at Key Stage 4 in recent years and officers expressed their disappointment at the most recent statistics which placed Islington 139th out of 152 local authorities against this indicator. It was noted that the previous year Islington was ranked 17th.
- Officers commented on the importance of co-producing SEND services with parents and young people. Six parents had worked with officers to co-produce the SEND Charter. The council had also established a 'Parent Parliament' of 70 parents to consult with.
- The council's priority was preparing young people with SEND for adulthood.
- Officers acknowledged that further work was needed to improve the support available to young people and their families. Officers commented on the need to embed multi-agency work, to ensure that young people with SEND received consistent support across services. However, it was considered that Islington offered high-quality provision which was developed in partnership with parents and young people.
- The Committee queried if the fact that fewer girls than boys in Islington were eligible for SEND support suggested that there was under-identification of girls with SEND. A member commented that girls with autism and other learning difficulties tended to behave differently to boys with the same needs. In response, officers indicated that they were not aware of a significant under-identification issue, however this may be an area for review in future.

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- The Committee queried why White British and Black Caribbean pupils in Islington were more likely to have SEND compared to the national average. In response, officers advised that this was a complex area and was being reviewed as part of the wider equalities work around White British and Black Caribbean attainment.

The Committee thanked officers for their attendance.

33 WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B3)

Noted.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.55pm

Chair