

**Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 4 March 2019**

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Monday 4 March 2019 at 7.00 pm.

**Present: Councillors:** Debono (Chair), Cutler (Vice-Chair), Bell-Bradford, Graham, Ismail, Ngongo and Spall

**Co-opted member:** Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese

**Also Present: Councillor:** Comer-Schwartz

**Councillor Theresa Debono in the Chair**

**66 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Woolf. Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Ismail.

**67 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A2)**

None.

**68 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A3)**

None.

**69 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. A4)**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 January 2019 be agreed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

**70 CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)**

The Chair noted that Councillor Comer-Schwartz had recently been appointed as the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families and welcomed her to the meeting.

The Chair thanked the Committee for their work in developing the draft recommendations of the scrutiny review of permanent and fixed period exclusion from school.

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

None.

72 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)**

None.

73 **QUARTERLY REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE (ITEM NO. B1)**

The report was introduced by Carmel Littleton, Corporate Director – People, Mark Taylor, Director of Learning and Schools, Jeff Cole, Head of School Improvement (Secondary) and Penny Kenway, Head of Early Years and Childcare.

The following main points were noted in the discussion.

- The Committee welcomed that the number of young people diverted from the Youth Justice system had increased and the number of first time entrants had decreased. Officers were pleased with the progress made, although warned against complacency.
- The number of repeat young offenders had increased by 2% compared to the same period the previous year, however, it was expected that the end of year figure would be lower than the previous year.
- The number of young offenders receiving custodial sentences had increased in comparison to the same period the previous year, from 7 to 15. Officers had reviewed all of the offences and considered that all of the sentences were appropriate given the severity of the offending, which was generally related to violent crime.
- The number of young people missing from care for more than 24 hours had slightly increased in comparison to the previous year. Officers explained that young people missing from care were almost always with a friend, however there was a concern that these young people were being exploited to commit criminal activity. The council worked in partnership with the Police to track and locate young people missing from care. The Committee requested further details of how many young people missing from care had been criminally exploited.
- The Committee queried if the young people missing from care tended to go missing from particular residential settings. In response, officers advised that the council only used settings rated as Good or Outstanding. Officers regularly reviewed instances of children missing from care to identify any trends, however this had not raised concerns about any specific settings.
- The Committee welcomed the high number of young people taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge.
- The Committee noted the lack of progress on increasing the percentage of 2 year old places in Early Years taken up by low income families, children with special educational needs or disabilities, and those who are looked after. Officers advised that this was a London-wide issue. Islington had a diverse range of communities and it was commented that some communities preferred to be at home with their children or

leave their children with relatives rather than access Early Years provision.

- Increasing the number of young people accessing Early Years provision was a key priority of the service, as local provision was generally high-quality and it was known that young people attending Early Years provision tended to have better outcomes in the longer term.
- The number of children achieving a Good Level of Development by the end of reception had increased to 71.1%, although was still slightly behind the London and England averages. It was explained that this figure was around 60 - 65% five years ago, so progress had been made in the longer term. It was also noted that children eligible for free school meals achieved a greater level of development than the national average.
- The Committee noted that levels of persistent absence had not improved. Officers advised that they were treating this as a school improvement issue and were working closely with the schools with the highest level of persistent absence. It was advised that it was often a small cohort of pupils with very high levels of absence that affected a school's overall attendance level, and therefore targeted work with families was often required.
- A member queried if there was a correlation between non-attendance of Early Years provision and persistent absence in school. In response, officers advised that the most significant reason for non-attendance was medical reasons, however this covered a broad spectrum of conditions and it was thought that non-attendance was not always justified in all instances.
- It was commented that fining parents for pupil non-attendance was not always an effective method of encouraging attendance. It was suggested that effective engagement with early help services was more beneficial.
- A member provided examples of single parents living in his ward who had advised that they could not get their children to school if one of the child's siblings was unwell. It was advised that the school should be notified of such situations as they may be able to find a solution to such issues.
- Following a question from a member of the public, it was advised that some absence from school was due to families taking holidays inside of term time. However, the number of recorded instances of this was fairly small and fines were issued as appropriate.
- It was noted that there had been a significant reduction in the number of children attending alternative provision in recent years.
- The Committee considered the gap in attainment between Black-Caribbean pupils and White British pupils eligible for Free School Meals and the Islington average. The attainment gap had widened and work was underway to address this, however officers noted that this was a long term piece of work which could not be resolved quickly. Officers had established an Equalities Reference Group with a diverse membership and considerable experience in equalities issues to review school practices and identify examples of good practice. The council

was also carrying out focused work with school leaders; a session on racism and racial stereotyping was held at the Deputy Head Teachers Conference. This session received a positive response and was to be repeated with school governors.

- A member noted the school-level interventions aimed at reducing the attainment gap and queried how the impact of such interventions could be measured. In response, it was advised that the impact of specific interventions was difficult to measure, but the council encouraged schools to adopt best practice approaches where it was thought that the intervention was effective. It was also noted that academic evaluation of some interventions was currently underway.
- A member noted that some disadvantaged children faced additional challenges, such as illiteracy, which would have a significant impact on their academic attainment, as well as their life outside of school. It was commented that a recent film, *H is for Harry*, explored this issue in detail. The Committee considered that the work to address educational inequalities was very important, although the council had to be careful not to stereotype families when targeting interventions.
- Officers advised that further reading material on educational inequalities would be provided to the Committee at a later date.
- The number of re-referrals to social care had reduced but was still above the London average.
- The long term placement stability of children in care had not improved. The council was evaluating the training of foster carers and this work was being reviewed through the Corporate Parenting Board.
- In response to a question from a member of the public, it was advised that comparative data on exclusions was published nationally.

**RESOLVED:**

That Children's Services performance in Quarter 2 2018/19 be noted.

74

**ISLINGTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
(ITEM NO. B2)**

Alan Caton, Independent Chair of the Islington Safeguarding Children Board, presented the report which summarised the work of the Board in 2017/18.

The following key point were noted in the discussion:

- Safeguarding children was a complex and challenging task. Although Islington Council was the lead authority for safeguarding in the borough, keeping children safe was everybody's responsibility.
- The Board was committed and determined to keep young people safe. During the 2017/18 year the Board was subject to an Ofsted inspection in which it was rated Good.
- The Board had three key priorities, addressing the impact of neglect on children, including to help children become more resilient; address the consequences / harm suffered as a result of domestic violence, parental

mental ill-health and substance abuse; and identification of children who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and holding perpetrators to account.

- The Board was concerned about the under-reporting of private fostering arrangements; very few placements were known, and the Board was working with colleagues in the NHS and others to increase reporting.
- 62 young people had been identified as being at risk of child sexual exploitation during the reporting period. The most common form of child sexual exploitation in Islington was peer-on-peer abuse. Targeted lessons were being delivered to pupils in Year 9 about the dangers of peer-on-peer exploitation.
- An ongoing priority of the Board was tackling county lines drug dealing. Young people involved in county lines drug dealing were at significant risk of harm; it was known that gangs were exploiting young people aged ten to seventeen.
- In response to a question, it was commented that the most frequent form of neglect was emotional neglect.
- It was explained that safeguarding arrangements would change in 2019 in response to the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The Act required the local authority, CCG and Police to establish a safeguarding partnership and determine their own safeguarding arrangements. Work was underway to develop the new arrangements, which would be implemented by 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019. Given that Islington already had good quality safeguarding arrangements, it was not proposed to radically alter existing processes.
- In response to a question, Mr Caton believed that the London-wide increase in youth violence was attributable to several factors, including the reduction in resources across the public sector.
- A member queried to what extent parents were involved in the work of the Board. In response, it was advised that the Board sought for young people to be involved in its work, but the involvement of parents was generally limited to participation in serious case reviews and child protection conferences.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Islington Safeguarding Children Board Annual report 2017/18 and its key messages be noted.

75

**THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES RESPONSE TO PREVENT - UPDATE (ITEM NO. B3)**

Jeff Cole, Head of School Improvement (Secondary), and Mark Taylor, Director of Learning and Schools, introduced the report which provided an update on Children's Services' response to the Prevent Duty.

- The response to the Prevent Duty was coordinated by the Prevent Strategy Group. The Group included representatives from a range of

services and education settings. Work was underway to expand the remit of the Group into a more developed council-wide offer.

- There had been a positive take up to Prevent training among schools, early years providers, mother tongue supplementary schools and foster carers. The Prevent Education Officer was working with schools to embed the training into training on safeguarding and gang issues.
- An Ofsted visit in May 2018 determined that the council's response to children and young people at risk of radicalisation was 'appropriate'.
- Members reported positive experiences of the Minority Matters programme and training in supplementary schools and community settings.
- A member queried if an evaluation had been carried out of the impact of the Shadow Games programme. In response, it was advised that feedback would be sought from the relevant officer.
- A member asked if the training offer to supplementary schools would alter following changes to their funding arrangements. In response, it was advised that these arrangements were to be confirmed, however officers were optimistic that a training offer would still be available.
- In response to a question, it was advised that the prevent work encompassed all types of extremism.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) To note the update on Children's Services' response to the Prevent Duty;
- (ii) To receive a further update in one year's time.

76

**PERMANENT AND FIXED PERIOD EXCLUSION FROM SCHOOL - PROPOSED DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS (ITEM NO. B4)**

The Committee considered the draft recommendations. It was agreed that a further recommendation on providing schools with a multi-disciplinary resource to help prevent exclusions at an early stage would be circulated to committee members for consideration.

The Committee noted the importance of monitoring the number of exclusions on an ongoing basis.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the draft recommendations be agreed;
- (ii) That an additional recommendation be circulated to committee members for consideration.

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**WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B5)**

Noted.

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MEETING CLOSED AT 8.40 pm

Chair