

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 30 April 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Tuesday, 30 April 2019 at 7.00 pm.

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

Councillor Theresa Debono in the Chair

78 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)

Apologies for absence were received from Mary Clement and Councillors Spall and Ngongo.

79 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A2)

None.

80 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A3)

None.

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

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 4 March 2019 be agreed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

82 CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)

The Chair advised that the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families was unable to attend the meeting, however would issue a written response to any questions submitted under Item B3.

The Chair advised that it was her last meeting as Chair of the Committee and thanked all members and officers for their hard work, contribution and commitment to the wellbeing of children.

The Committee thanked the Chair for her work and support over the previous three years.

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

None.

84

PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)

None.

85

QUARTERLY REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE (Q3 2018/19) (ITEM NO. B1)

The Committee considered the Quarterly Review of Children's Services Performance (Item B1) alongside the Education Annual Report (Item B2).

The report was introduced by Finola Culbert, Director of Safeguarding and Family Support, Mark Taylor, Director of Learning and Schools, and Andrea Stark, Director of Employment, Skills and Culture. Other officers also contributed to the discussion.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- Officers continued to be pleased with progress made on diverting young people from the criminal justice system and reducing the number of repeat young offenders.
- There had been an increase in the number of custodial sentences for young people. The cases had been reviewed by officers and it was considered that the custodial sentences were appropriate given the severity of offending.
- The number of children missing from care for over 24 hours had increased. Officers advised that all children were offered return home interviews and almost all kept in contact with their social worker while they were missing.
- The percentage of re-referrals to children's social care was stable. Officers attributed positive performance to the impact of the council's motivational social work model.
- The percentage of children becoming the subject of a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time had slightly increased. Officers advised that Islington's overall performance against this indicator was positive and a number of cases would be re-audited at the end of the year.
- The Committee noted concerns about the long term stability of placements for looked after children. It was advised that in recent years there had been an increase in the number of older children and teenagers becoming looked after. These young people tended to have complex needs and entrenched issues which presented significant challenges. Work with the Fostering Service was underway to ensure that foster carers were well-equipped to support young people with such needs.
- A member provided an example of a family willing to foster care, however they no longer had a spare bedroom as they were previously encouraged to downsize by the council's Housing service. Officers agreed to look into this issue outside of the meeting.

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 30 April 2019

- Following a question, officers advised that there was a correlation between children missing from care and those being issued with custodial sentences. These young people typically would have had sustained engagement with local services and previous experiences of trauma. The Committee requested that anonymised case studies be reported to a future meeting.
- Islington continued to make progress on the percentage of school leavers moving into education, employment or training. Officers noted that the committee's previous scrutiny review of Post-16 Education, Employment and Training had recommended bringing together the Youth Employment Team and the Progress Team. This had been implemented successfully and officers believed had contributed to the council's improved performance in this area.
- Officers provided updates on implementing two key projects; the '11 by 11' pledge which would give Islington's young people 11 cultural experiences by the age of 11 and the pledge to give Islington's young people 100 hours experience of the world of work by the age of 16. Both programmes were crucial to advancing the council's fairness agenda. Both programmes required the development of large-scale partnerships with local organisations and businesses.
- The '11 by 11' programme was launched in March 2019. The launch event was attended by two thirds of local schools and 60 organisations had signed up to provide free cultural experiences to young people. The organisations would also provide school assemblies and other learning materials.
- The 'World of Work' programme would be formally launched in the autumn. Officers were engaging with local businesses and encouraging them to sign-up to the programme. It was advised that many businesses were enthusiastic about the programme, particularly the opportunity to engage with younger children. Officers advised that progress would be reported to future meetings of the Committee.
- A member commended the '11 by 11' programme, emphasising the importance of giving young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, access to cultural activities. However, the member also emphasised the importance of cultural diversity. The programme was an opportunity to break down barriers between the borough's diverse communities. It was suggested that the programme would maximise its impact by embracing all forms of culture, rather than focusing exclusively on activities typically reserved for middle class families. In response, officers advised that Islington had one of the most vibrant cultural sectors in the country and it was intended to give young people the confidence to be able to access all types of cultural activity. It was acknowledged that the borough's cultural organisations were not as diverse as the borough's communities, however the council would work to give young people a broad range of cultural experiences. This would include working with organisations outside of the borough if required.
- A member praised the increase in the percentage of young people moving into employment, education or training, however queried if

officers were monitoring Year 13 sustainability and pupil engagement. Officers advised that this was sometimes challenging however greater coordination between the Progress and Employment teams and the Youth Offending Service was supporting sustained participation.

- The Committee expressed concern about the breadth of opportunities available to young people dropping out of college and suggested that this area would benefit from further detailed analysis. Officers advised that the council had commissioned research which would evaluate the local employment market and opportunities at local colleges, sixth forms and universities. This would inform the council's skills strategy.
- The Committee noted a typographical error at indicator 2.4 on page 27 of the report. It was clarified that the number of schools that had expressed an interest in the cultural enrichment programme had increased.
- The take up of funded early years places for two year olds was static although broadly in keeping with the London average. It was noted that London had higher rates of take up than the rest of the country. Partnership work was underway with health colleagues to improve the targeted marketing of early years provision.
- The Committee noted that 61% of children eligible for free school meals achieved a 'Good Level of Development' in the early years foundation stage. This compared to 75% of pupils not eligible for free school meals. Officers expressed concern at this disparity and commented that a multi-faceted approach was needed to address the issue.
- Officers advised that education inequalities and persistent absence were two of their top priorities and targeted work with schools was underway.
- Officers explained their action plan for working with schools with high levels of persistent absence. Briefing sessions were being held with schools on how to analyse attendance data, identify issues and challenge medical absence where appropriate. A school with low levels of persistent absence was invited to these sessions so they could share their insights. The council was also working to increase governor awareness of attendance issues.
- In response to a question, it was clarified that some schools had high levels of absence due to relatively minor illnesses which should not ordinarily result in a child being absent from school. It was suggested that both schools and parents would benefit from advice on when it was appropriate for a child to miss school due to illness.
- A member provided an example of a child being sent home from school because they had a minor illness. The Committee reiterated that challenging schools on attendance issues was in the public interest.
- Officers advised that Islington's education equalities issues mirrored the national picture. This issue was being raised at every meeting with schools.
- It was advised that research had been undertaken into the equalities impact of teaching pupils in sets as opposed to mixed ability groups and the findings would be reported to the next head teachers briefing.

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 30 April 2019

- The Committee expressed concern that the gaps in academic attainment between Black Caribbean pupils and White British pupils eligible for free school meals and the Islington average had increased over the previous year. The Committee emphasised that challenging education equalities issues needed to be a very high priority and reiterated their desire for real progress to be made on this issue. Officers commented that this was a very significant piece of work which could not be solved easily; sustained work was required which needed to be carried out sensitively.
- Officers advised that a successful training session on cultural competency and unconscious bias had been held with both head teachers and deputy head teachers. Attendees had reported that the session had been very helpful.
- Following a question from a member of the public, it was advised that there had been a small increase in the number of pupils in alternative provision.
- A member suggested that Black Caribbean and white working class pupils would benefit from targeted supplementary schools. Officers advised that before and after-school clubs were available.
- Officers advised of the Upward Bound programme which aimed to raise the attainment and aspirations of Islington pupils. The programme was run in partnership with London Metropolitan University. Officers suggested that members may wish to carry out a visit and observe a session.
- A member of the public highlighted the importance of co-designing services with young people.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That Children's Services performance in Quarter 3 2019/20 be noted;
- (ii) That the Education Annual Report be noted.

86

EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORT 2018 (ITEM NO. B2)

This item was considered alongside Item B1.

87

EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE AND QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. B3)

The Committee noted that the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families had submitted apologies for absence and would respond to any questions in writing.

88

PERMANENT AND FIXED PERIOD EXCLUSION FROM SCHOOL - DRAFT REPORT (ITEM NO. B4)

Members of the Committee proposed a number of minor typographical and stylistic amendments.

RESOLVED:

That the draft report be agreed and submitted to the Executive, subject to a number of minor typographical and stylistic amendments.

MEETING CLOSED AT 8.45 pm

Chair