

**Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 9 July 2019**

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held in Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Tuesday 9 July 2019 at 7.30 pm.

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

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

**Councillor Vivien Cutler in the Chair**

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

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Ngongo and Clarke-Perry.

Apologies for absence were also received from the Corporate Director of People.

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

None.

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

None.

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

Further to Minute 97, concerning services for victims and perpetrators of violence against women and girls, it was advised that an annual report on services for perpetrators could be circulated to members.

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 June 2019 be agreed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

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

The Chair advised that a productive meeting had been held with officers to develop the scope of the review of Equalities in Educational Outcomes.

The Chair advised that she had attended the Executive to present the report of the scrutiny review on Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusion from School. It was noted that the Executive had welcomed the review and that the Executive would formally respond in due course.

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

None.

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

None.

108 **EQUALITIES IN EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES - SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT AND INTRODUCTORY BRIEFING (ITEM NO. B1)**

a) Scrutiny Initiation Document

The Chair introduced the Scrutiny Initiation Document, emphasising that this was an important review with ambitious objectives. It was highlighted that this was a timely review given the equalities issues raised in the committee's review of Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusion from School and the Timpson Review of School Exclusion.

The Committee requested that any visits held as part of the scrutiny review be held in the evening to facilitate member attendance.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Scrutiny Initiation Document be agreed.

b) Introductory Briefing

Mark Taylor, Director of Learning and Schools, in consultation with a number of officers, made a presentation to the Committee providing demographic and equalities data on a range of educational matters.

The following main points were noted in the presentation:

- The number of children eligible for free school meals and pupil premium in Islington was significantly higher than the national average.
- The demographic group with the highest rate of absence was White UK pupils eligible for pupil premium. A project was underway to improve attendance in the ten schools with the highest levels of absence and it was noted that nine of the ten schools had seen an improvement.
- Black Caribbean and White UK pupils eligible for pupil premium were disproportionately affected by exclusion.
- In Islington, Black Caribbean and White UK pupils eligible for free school meals tended to attain a below average score for 'Good Level of Development' at Early Years Foundation Stage. Officers advised that this was evidence of the attainment gap presenting early in a young person's life.
- There were three prime areas assessed as part of the Good Level of Development criteria. These were Communication and Language, Physical Development, and Personal Social and Emotional Development. On average, White UK pupils eligible for free school meals scored below average against each of these areas, whereas on average Black Caribbean pupils only scored below average for Personal Social and Emotional Development.

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- It was commented that the Good Level of Development assessment would reflect young people's experiences from birth. Low scores on the assessment could be indicative of young people experiencing trauma. It was noted that the attainment gap at Early Years Foundation Stage was consistent year on year.
- It was queried if Black Caribbean and White UK parents whose children were eligible for free school meals were less likely to access services than parents from other demographic groups. The Committee suggested that breaking down the data by geographic area (i.e. electoral ward) would assist in better targeting parents who may not be engaging with the support services available.
- It was advised that around 40% of families did not take up their entitlement to funded early places for two year olds. This was a national issue.
- In response to a query, it was advised that national data on the Good Level of Development was not available for White British pupils eligible for free school meals.
- It was advised that it was sometimes difficult to provide demographic data at Early Years Foundation Stage as parents were not required to complete equalities data to declare their ethnicity.
- Performance data for Reading, Writing and Maths at Key Stage 1 indicated that the attainment gap for Black Caribbean pupils and White British pupils eligible for pupil premium began to widen from a young age. This attainment gap was more pronounced in Islington than at national level.
- The attainment gap widened further at Key Stage 4. Progress 8 data indicated that, on average, White British pupils eligible for pupil premium achieved half a grade lower at GCSE than their peers. The gap was particularly wide in the key subjects of English and Maths.
- Officers advised that there was a correlation between low attainment and high levels of absence, caused by either attendance issues or exclusion. Pupils who had missed lessons could struggle to re-engage in education. Once they had fallen behind their peers they often did not catch up.
- Officers suggested that the changes to the curriculum in recent years had disproportionately affected certain demographic groups. The new curriculum had more content than in the past and therefore absence had a more significant impact. The new curriculum was also considered to be less diverse and less inclusive than the previous curriculum. For example, all texts not written by British authors had been removed from the GCSE English curriculum. This strong focus on a historic White British literary canon was not engaging for all pupils. Furthermore, GCSEs were now carried out entirely through terminal assessment and there was no coursework element. This required pupils to have strong organisational and revision skills; pupils with more living space and few disruptions at home were more likely to embed effective study habits. This could be more challenging for pupils in adverse socio-economic circumstances.

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- Officers also expressed concern that the new GCSE curriculum had impacted on the Key Stage 3 curriculum, with schools keen to prepare their pupils for sitting GCSEs.
- It was advised that Black Caribbean pupils and White British pupils eligible for free school meals were disproportionately affected by mental health issues. The Committee expressed concern that the terminal examination assessment method could be particularly challenging for those with anxiety disorders.
- A member suggested that further data on the gender and the housing tenure of pupils would be helpful, as well as school-level data.
- The Committee discussed the relationship between absence from school and attainment, as the data suggested that Bangladeshi and Kurdish pupils had relatively high levels of absence but did not experience the same attainment gap. In response, it was advised that absence was one of many factors affecting attainment and the reason for the absence was also an important factor. It was also advised that many Turkish pupils studied Turkish GCSE very successfully, which would increase their overall attainment.
- In response to a question, it was advised that the attainment gap for Black Caribbean pupils and White British pupils eligible for free school meals was a national issue. There was a greater attainment gap in Islington than in some other boroughs, however it was also advised that some boroughs had a greater gap in attainment than Islington.
- A member of the public suggested that tracking pupil progress over time would be an effective method of assessing how the attainment gap develops.

The Committee thanked officers for their attendance.

### 109 **QUARTERLY REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE (Q4 2018/19) (ITEM NO. B2)**

Laura Eden, Director of Youth and Communities, introduced the report summarising the performance of services for children and young people.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Committee expressed concern at the increase in the number of young people in custody.
- There had been a small increase in the number of children missing from care. Officers advised that exploitation was often a factor in these cases.
- There had been an increase in the percentage of 16 and 17 year old residents NEET. Officers advised that the dip in performance during the recording window was partially attributable to a recording error arising from staff sickness absence. The service was redoubling efforts to improve performance in this area by ensuring that appropriate cover arrangements were in place. The service was also developing stronger relationships with the Youth Offending Service and teams working with

vulnerable groups. Officers believed that this quarterly increase in young people NEET was not a trend.

- The overall number of children becoming subject to a Child Protection Plan had decreased, therefore the percentage of children becoming the subject of the Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time had increased. It was commented that these young people may be affected by exploitation, serious youth violence and domestic violence.
- Officers advised there was a growing trend of young people in the care of family members being subject to Child Protection Plans.
- A member of the public welcomed the number of schools that had expressed an interest in the cultural enrichment programme, however queried if targets related to the programme were sufficiently ambitious. In response, it was advised that from the autumn term all schools would be expected to engage with the programme.
- The Committee queried why some schools were not choosing to participate in the cultural enrichment programme. In response, it was advised that there were no obvious barriers to participation, the programme was free for schools and had been developed in consultation with teachers. It was thought that some schools already had their own programme and thought this was sufficient.

**RESOLVED:**

That Children's Services performance in Quarter 4 2018/19 be noted.

**110**      **COORDINATED AND JOINED UP SERVICES FOR VULNERABLE ADOLESCENTS SCRUTINY REVIEW - 12 MONTH REPORT BACK (ITEM NO. B3)**

Andrea Stark, Director of Employment, Skills and Culture, introduced the report which set out progress on the scrutiny review of coordinated and joined up services for vulnerable adolescents.

It was advised that the scrutiny review had supported the department in joining up services for vulnerable young people. The Committee noted the progress detailed in the report.

In response to a query, it was commented that the council had received positive feedback from schools on the trauma informed practice training. It was thought that this was having an impact and influencing the thinking of school leaders. A member of the committee commented that school governors were particularly enthusiastic about the training.

The Committee noted that MHCLG funding for the multi-partnership prototype on domestic abuse and parental conflict would cease and the end of the current financial year. Officers advised that this was not expected to be a long-term source of funding and the prototype would be reviewed at the end of the year.

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A member of the public queried the recommendation relating to young people contacting their social worker through instant messaging. Officers explained the safeguarding processes in place to protect young people and social workers.

**RESOLVED:**

That the progress on actions taken in response to the Vulnerable Adolescents Scrutiny Review be noted.

**111**      **WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B4)**  
Noted.

MEETING CLOSED AT 8.55 pm

Chair