

London Borough of Islington
Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 20 July 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD - Islington Town Hall on Tuesday, 20 July 2021 at 7.00 pm.

Present:	Councillors:	Chapman (Chair), Bell-Bradford, Burgess, Convery, North and Wolf
	Co-opted Member	Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese Zaleera Wallace, Parent Governor Representative (Secondary)

Councillor Sheila Chapman in the Chair

260 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)**
Apologies were received from Councillor Ozdemir, Councillor Woodbyrne and Claire Ballak.

261 **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A2)**
None.

262 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A3)**
None.

263 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. A4)**
RESOLVED:
That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2021 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

264 **CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A5)**
The Chair expressed her condolences at the passing of Carmel Littleton. She reported that she had been copied into a letter from Vicky Ford MP, Minister for Children and Families sending her condolences. The committee were grateful for the work of Carmel Littleton, particularly in relation to the most vulnerable. Work would continue to follow Carmel's legacy.

The Chair reported that on 7 July 2021, she had attended a meeting with Headteachers exploring the work of the local authority and how schools and the local authority could work together on a shared vision. She had also attended a Corporate Parenting Board away day looking at terms of reference and how best to hear the voices of children and young people.

Two members of the committee had attended a meeting on school place planning and had briefed the other committee members.

The chair reported that she was aware from the news, that one quarter of pupils were not in school in the previous week and most of the absence was due to self-isolation.

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

None.

266 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A7)

None.

267 SEND SCRUTINY REVIEW - SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT AND INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION (ITEM NO. B1)

Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services gave an introductory presentation on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

In the presentation and discussion the following points were made:

- The SEND Code of Practice provided statutory guidance on duties, policies and procedures relating to the Children and Families Act 2014.
- The Code applied to all children and young people with SEND age 0-25.
- Where the text used the word 'must' it referred to a statutory requirement under primary legislation, regulations or case law.
- All relevant bodies (including local authorities, governing bodies and all schools and settings) must fulfill their statutory duties towards children and young people with SEND in light of the guidance set out in the Code.
- When considering an appeal from a parent or young person, the First-tier Tribunal (Special Educational Needs and Disability) ('the Tribunal') must have regard to the Code of Practice. The Tribunal expected Local Authorities and schools to be able to explain any departure from the Code.
- The key principles of the Code were: 1) Full participation of parents, children and young people in assessment, planning and review, 2) Collaboration between Education, Health and Care Services, 3) A focus on inclusive practice and 4) Supporting successful transition to adulthood.
- The Children and Families Act 2014 secured the general presumption in law of mainstream education in relation to decisions about where children and young people with SEND should be educated, and the Equality Act 2010 provided protection from discrimination for disabled people.
- Where a child or young person had SEND but did not have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan they must be educated in a mainstream setting.
- The School Admissions Code of Practice required children and young people with SEN to be treated fairly. Admissions authorities: 1) must consider applications from parents of children with SEN but not an EHC plan on the basis of the school's published admissions criteria as part of normal admissions procedures; 2) must not refuse to admit a child with SEN but without an EHC plan because they did not feel able to cater for

those needs; 3) must not refuse to admit a child on the grounds that they did not have an EHC plan.

- Where a child had an EHC plan, the child's parent (or the young person if over 16) had the right to request a particular school, college or other institution to be named in their EHC plan and the local authority must comply with that preference and name the school or college in the EHC plan unless to do so would be:
 - unsuitable for the age, ability, aptitude or SEND of the child or young person, or
 - incompatible with the efficient education of others, or the efficient use of resources.
- In mainstream schools, school-based provision was called SEND Support. Schools were expected to follow a 'graduated approach' to SEND Support intervention that took the form of cycles of 'assess, plan, do, review' as an ongoing process to make sure provision was meeting identified needs. They should also consult relevant external agencies, make use of assessment tools and materials, record observations and evidence of progress.
- For children with significant or complex needs, where levels of support and intervention did not lead to expected progress, schools or parents could request a statutory Education Health and Care assessment. If needs were assessed as beyond a level that could be met from resources normally available to schools, an Education, Health and Care Plan might be issued.
- The national model had three levels of funding for SEND, with Elements 1 and 2 paid through school budgets, and Element 3 directly from the local authority. All schools received funding for each pupil as part of their delegated funding - the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) or Element 1. Support which was in addition to/different from the general was covered by another source of funding which was part of a school's delegated budget, known as Element 2. For children with more complex needs, Element 3 'top-up' funding (i.e. to top up already available Element 1 and 2) funding was managed by the local authority, normally through an EHC plan.
- The local offer included schools for physical and sensory need, social, emotional and mental health, communication and interaction and learning and cognition. Where a child had more specialist needs, these could be provided out of borough.
- Islington had 'SEN Support in Islington' handbooks for: 1) the Early Years and Primary Local Offer, 2) Secondary and Post 16 Local Offer, 3) Advice, Guidance and Expectations and 4) Behaviour.
- There were currently 1,509 children with an EHCP, 178 of whom had no additional education top up. Of the remaining 1331, the total Islington cost (mainstream & special) was £14,609,451. This related to 991 children/young people at an average cost of £14,742 per pupil and the total out of borough cost (mainstream & special) was £5,225,996. This related to 334 children/young people at an average cost of £15,515 per pupil. Of these 334 children/young people, 44 (13%) were looked after

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children at a cost of £775,993 (£17,634 average cost per pupil) and 140 (41%) were in Further Education.

- Of the 255 children/young people in out-borough mainstream education, 117 (around 50%) were in Further Education colleges.
- Of the £2,383,607 spent on out-borough special provision, 31 children/young people (2%) were in independent schools at a cost of £1,164,565 with an average cost of £35,566 per pupil). However Islington's spend was lower than comparators.
- Of those in out of borough (mainstream and special provision) 193 (57%) were attending school / college in adjacent boroughs (Camden, Hackney, Haringey). Another 44 (13%) were Looked After Children.
- 22% of Islington resident children/young people with SEND attended schools out of borough. 25% of non-SEND children/young people attended schools out of borough.
- 40 county councils in England were warning of a £1.3bn SEN deficit which threatened to derail their finances and undermine capacity to support recovery efforts after the pandemic.
- The SEN Green Paper was expected in mid-July, but this would no longer be the case. The Minister of State for Children and Families had stated that systemic change was needed and acknowledged issues with the current system. She stated that work would continue and proposals for public consultation would be published as soon as possible.
- A SEND Strategy 2018-21 was in place and there was a Self-Evaluation detailing progress to March 2020, prior to the Covid disruption. A needs assessment (March 2021) and an Impact of Covid-19 Self-Evaluation (June 2021) were informing the development of an updated strategy.
- It was important to create a local system that could be trusted. There was a need to look at provision due to increased need and complexity. There was also a need for inclusive practice as this was not currently fully embedded across all settings. Fairness and equity were therefore of high priority in considering whether the system could be funded differently.
- In response to a question from a member about Element 3 funding and how Islington compared to neighbouring boroughs, the officer advised that Islington was in the top quartile of local authorities and funded to a higher level than neighbours.
- In response to a member's question about how life chances could be improved, the officer advised that culture, ethos and philosophy were important. It would be a challenge to ensure consistency of practice across provisions but work would be taking place on this in the next few months.
- In response to a question about the evidence that was helping to create a local system, the officer advised that this would be made available to committee members during the course of the scrutiny review.
- A member raised concern about the disparity between boys and girls with autism. The officer advised that Islington's average of girls to boys was better than the national average. However, often girls presented as adolescents and sometimes this manifested as self-harming or eating disorders.

- A member raised concern about disparity in relation to ethnicity and was advised that Black African groups were overrepresented early and this reversed at secondary school. There was double the average number of EHCPs amongst Black Somali young people. Work was taking place with Somali groups and consideration was being given to whether diagnostic tools were accurate. It was recognised that trauma and inherited trauma could also be factors in the overrepresentation.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the presentation be noted.
- 2) That the Scrutiny Initiation Document (SID) be approved.

268

EXECUTIVE MEMBER ANNUAL REPORT (ITEM NO. B2)

Cllr Michelline Ngongo, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families presented the report which covered the period October 2020-July 2021 and gave a presentation entitled "Their Ambitions, Our Future: Children and young people at the centre".

Councillor Ngongo thanked Councillor Comer-Schwartz for her work prior to Councillor Ngongo taking over as Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families in January 2021.

In the presentation and discussion the following main points were made:

- During lockdown council services supported children and young people in the following ways:
 - The children of critical workers, vulnerable children with a social worker and those with an EHCP were supported to attend school;
 - Free Wi-Fi was given to care leavers;
 - Devices were organised and allocated to support children with their learning;
 - Food parcel deliveries were given to vulnerable families in partnership with voluntary sector partners;
 - There was investment in supporting the increasing need for social, emotional and mental health support;
 - Key services for children and young people including early years and childcare settings, adventure playgrounds, youth centres and hubs and libraries were open to those who needed them;
 - Face to face contact with children during the pandemic was based on a dynamic risk assessment of the need for multi-agency support;
 - Face to face contact with children, young people and their parents/carers for other services was resumed gradually;
 - Programmes of work aimed to ensure that groups such as Black Caribbean pupils made good progress and attained as well as their peers;
 - Actions were taken forward from the joint study with the Youth Justice Board to address the disproportionality of Black, Asian and other minority ethnic young people in the youth justice system;
 - Community safety issues for young people were addressed.
- Councillor Ngongo had set five priorities as follows:

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- 1) To have a Parent Voice Forum to guide parents to find support, to provide training and help parents to learn from each other. The group met once a month and chose the topic for each meeting.
 - 2) To have a Young People's Forum led by young people. Subjects included GCSES and help with CVs. Someone from the Job Centre had recently attended along with a member of the Youth Employment Team to give advice.
 - 3) Book boxes. 100 books had been distributed to the Mother Tongue Supplementary Schools.
 - 4) Youth procurement and provision. Meetings between local councillors, parents, young people, schools and the community could help improve services.
 - 5) No Need to Exclude involved looking at what could be done differently to look at the root cause of a child behaving badly and how the child could be helped.
- Work was taking place to "Imagine, Ignite and Inspire" a Fair Islington for children and young people ensuring they were safe, cared for, could succeed in learning and thrive post-Covid.
 - It was important to build relationships and work in full collaboration with children and young people at the centre as well as rebuilt back better after Covid.
 - An away day had been held for members of the Corporate Parenting Board and lifelong parenting had been discussed.
 - Councillor Ngongo would be having a meeting with government officials about funding and support for children and young people in a post-Covid Islington.
 - There would be a future focus on helping young people with employment and skills.
 - Lifelong learning and enrichment would enable and empower children, young people and adults with the learning and skills for life, work and the future of work supported by a high quality and high performing, inclusive education and skills system.
 - Early help and working together for a safer Islington would enable and deliver system-wide approaches with local partners to intervene early and prevent problems from escalating among children, young people, their families and the wider community.
 - There would be a holiday activity and food offer with several school willing to facilitate activities.
 - Work was taking place to empower children, young people and adults to have choice and control over their care and support based on what mattered to them, their individual strengths and needs to build on the expertise of people, families and communities.
 - An event had been held to thank foster carers.
 - Work was taking place to maximise independence to enable young people and adults who required support to either transition to and/or live healthy, independent and fulfilled lives with strong networks.
 - As part of the Children's Social Care Transformation Programme families willing to foster but with insufficient space were being assisted to address this.

- Where putting children and young people into care was likely to increase risk and/or not improve their outcomes, prevention services worked intensively with each family to maintain their child in the community.
- As part of the work to reinvent and rebuild, the talents of staff and learning from Covid-19 would help design forward differently to help Islington recover.
- Working would take place in partnership with schools to identify and facilitate their work to support children in a post-Covid community
- Work would take place with Early Years, Childcare and Bright Start to help the take-up of places for early years and childcare recover to pre-Covid levels and return to high levels of face to face Bright Start activity for families with young children.
- A member commented on the exceptional response during the pandemic and stated that although Covid restrictions had been lifted, there was still much uncertainty and sustained efforts would be required to help children move on from Covid-19.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

269

CORPORATE PARENTING REPORT (ITEM NO. B3)

Laura Eden presented the Annual Report which was an overview of achievements, progress and challenges in meeting the needs of Islington's children looked after and care experienced young people from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

In the discussion the following main points were made:

- In March 2020 there were 366 care leavers. The figure was now 426.
- In response to a member's question about the numbers of care leavers in Education, Employment or Training (EET), the officer reported that the EET figures had improved despite Covid. The Youth Employability and Skills Team had been successful in improving the figures and this work would continue.
- In response to a question about the role of the Children's Active Involvement Service, the officer stated that there was a chair and vice-chair, the young people conducted surveys to obtain views and improve services and ran activities and training. Prior to Covid, the young people had run sessions to enhance the understanding of young people's experience as residents at semi-independence units with staff there. This had led to some of them becoming young commissioners undertaking contact monitoring of semi-independent provisions. They also had a role on the Corporate Parenting Board influencing service delivery and being the voice of children in care and care leavers. Whilst every council was required to have an In Care Council with a chair and vice-chair, it was less usual for CAIS (Islington's name for its In Care Council) to have such a vital role on Corporate Parenting Boards.
- A member reported that prior to Covid, some looked after children had given a presentation to councillors and this had been useful in

reminding councillors of their role as corporate parents. An officer stated that some local authorities held a corporate parents' evening but care had to be taken as some young people had had difficult life experiences they did not always want to share. A co-optee raised concern about asking young people to present to councillors when they had often had to talk to lots of people about their experiences over the course of their lives. An officer suggested that any councillor was welcome to go to CAIS, the In Care Council where there would be young people willing to speak to them.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

270 WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B4)

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

271 SEND SCRUTINY REVIEW - SID AND INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION - APPENDIX (ITEM NO. E1)

RESOLVED:

That the appendix be noted.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.15 pm

Chair