

**Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 3 June 2019**

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Monday, 3 June 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

**Also present:**   Councillor Comer-Schwartz, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families

**Councillor Vivien Cutler in the Chair**

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ngongo.

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

None.

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

None.

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

The Committee noted that it was queried at the previous meeting when the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families would be attending meetings of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee to answer questions from the committee and members of the public. It was advised that this matter was to be dealt with under Item B5, Scrutiny Topics and Work Programme 2019/20.

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 30 April 2019 be agreed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

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

The Chair advised that committee members had informally discussed scrutiny topics and the work programme for 2019/20 and a number of suggestions had been made. These would be considered further under Item B5.

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

None.

**95**      **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. 7A)**

A member of the public asked if the Council was assured that Islington schools were GDPR compliant. In response, officers advised that all local authority schools had received relevant training and data protection was taken very seriously by governing bodies and school leadership teams. It was advised that further details would be supplied in a written response.

A member of the public asked if Islington Council would be submitting bids to the Mayor's Youth Fund, noting that previously the council had not directly applied for funding, but had supported bids for other organisations operating in Islington. Officers advised that a written response would be sent.

**96**      **MEMBERSHIP, TERMS OF REFERENCE, DATES OF MEETINGS (ITEM NO. B1)**

**RESOLVED:**

That the membership of the Committee, the terms of reference and the dates of meetings for the municipal year 2019/20 be noted.

**97**      **EXECUTIVE MEMBER ANNUAL PRESENTATION (ITEM NO. B2)**

Councillor Comer-Schwartz, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families, presented to the Committee on her priorities for the 2019/20 municipal year.

The following main points were noted in the discussion:

- The Executive Member's three priorities for the year were: continual educational improvement, preventing the criminal exploitation of children and keeping Islington's children safe.
- 51% of the borough's primary schools were above the national and Inner-London average.
- 69% of pupils achieved the combined requirements for reading, writing and maths. The Inner-London average was 71% and the Executive Member wanted Islington's young people to exceed this figure.
- The Executive Member was concerned that Islington had one of the highest rates of primary school absence in the country. It was

commented that this could be an indicator of wider issues such as unemployment and poor health outcomes. Addressing absence was a priority for Children's Services as absence from school entrenched disadvantage. It was particularly concerning that neighbouring boroughs did not experience the same issues. Targeted work was underway with parents, school leaders and governing bodies to improve attendance.

- The Executive Member welcomed the Committee's review of exclusion from school and advised that the Executive would respond to the committee's recommendations in due course.
- The Executive Member was pleased with the progress made by pupils with special educational needs and learning disabilities (SEND), however expressed frustration with the lack of national funding for support services. Officers were reviewing Islington's offer to pupils with emotional needs. The Executive Member was also keen to improve provision for SEND pupils at post-16.
- The Executive Member was pleased with the quality of the borough's early years' provision but was concerned by the level of engagement, as the attendance of two-year olds was below target. A communications strategy was being developed to promote engagement.
- Islington schools performed well in terms of the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, however there was a gap in attainment for Black Caribbean pupils and White British pupils eligible for free school meals.
- The Committee noted the progress with the council's cultural enrichment programme, '11 by 11' which sought to give pupils 11 cultural experiences by age 11, and the World of Work programme, which would give pupils 100 hours' work-related by age 16.
- County lines was an ongoing London-wide and national issue. At the end of March 2019, 20 children had been identified as being at risk of county lines. The Executive Member emphasised the importance of working with partners across London and beyond to support vulnerable young people.
- The number of safeguarding referrals had decreased over the previous year and the Executive Member was challenging the reasons for this.
- The Executive Member welcomed that there had been a reduction in the number of child protection plans. It was suggested that this was a result of the council's family-centred approach.
- The Committee noted the work underway to support victims of domestic violence and prevent violence against women and girls. The IRIS project worked with GPs to help them identify and support victims of domestic abuse. Training was being provided to 25 GP practices and 200 women had been supported. The council also worked with perpetrators of abuse to challenge and change their behaviour. The Executive Member highlighted that the majority of programmes were funded on an annual basis and explained the challenges that this presented to support services. The council was hoping to access MOPAC funding as a more sustainable source of income for these services.
- The council's early help services worked with 2,533 individuals and 1,635 families in 2018/19. The council was working to expand early

help approaches into partner organisations to provide better preventative support to families and encourage referrals to early help services.

- A member asked about the variation in the performance of Islington schools. In response it was advised that there was a level of variation and targeted work with schools was carried out as necessary.
- In response to a question about primary school absence, it was commented that some schools had reported issues with families taking holidays in term time and others had reported unusually high levels of sickness absence for relatively minor ailments. Officers suggested that some schools needed to have challenging conversations with parents and the council was working with headteachers on this issue. The Committee queried why Islington had a high level of absence in comparison to neighbouring boroughs. In response it was advised that this was only an issue at particular schools and this affected the overall performance of the borough.
- The Committee welcomed that the borough's overall Progress 8 and Attainment 8 scores had improved over the past year.
- The Committee requested a detailed breakdown of spending on services for victims and perpetrators of violence against women and girls. It was advised that further information would be provided outside of the meeting.
- In response to a question, it was advised that Islington was a relatively high identifier of pupils with special educational needs and learning disabilities, however there was a degree of variation between schools.
- In response to a question, it was confirmed that schools were actively involved in work to support pupils at risk of county lines and domestic violence. All schools received training on these issues. Services also engaged directly with pupils to promote their resilience and empower them to seek support.
- A member of the public asked the Executive Member if the council would be encouraging schools to take part in the boycott of SATs. In response, it was advised that schools must meet their legal requirements, however the Executive Member shared concerns about the over-examination of children.

The Committee thanked Councillor Comer-Schwartz for her attendance.

**98 UPDATE ON THE TIMPSON REVIEW OF SCHOOL EXCLUSION (ITEM NO. B3)**

Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services, introduced the update on the Timpson Review of School Exclusion. It was advised that the report of the review had been published and included 30 recommendations which the government had accepted in principle.

It was noted that many of the recommendations and findings were consistent with the committee's own review of exclusion from school.

The Committee noted that the Timpson Review had not made conclusions on the reasons why particular demographic groups were disproportionately affected by exclusion. The Committee believed this to be a missed opportunity and was disappointed that the report did not address equalities issues in a satisfactory way.

The Committee expressed concern that the report did not condemn zero-tolerance approaches, which the committee thought could result in a high number of exclusions.

**99**      **THE ROLE OF ISLINGTON'S SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOLS (ITEM NO. B4)**

Jeff Cole, Head of School Improvement (Secondary), and Abed Moftizadeh, Community Learning Consultant, introduced the report which set out the role of mother tongue and supplementary schools in the borough.

The Committee noted that, following intense cost pressures on schools, the Schools Forum had decided to cease the funding of such schools from March 2019. Islington Council had worked to identify small amounts of interim funding for the 2019/20 year. Organisations were being signposted to alternative sources of funding.

The Committee expressed regret at the cuts to funding for such services. It was recognised that school budgets had been cut by central government and this resulted in the Schools Forum having to reassess and prioritise all spending. Officers also noted that schools had increasingly limited discretion in how they spent their funding as the number of ring-fenced funds had increased in recent years.

A member of the public asked if Islington's supplementary schools had been quality assessed. In response it was advised that the council's Community Learning Consultant was an assessor and the majority of the supplementary schools were rated 'bronze' on the national framework.

A member of the public asked if a resident impact assessment had been completed before the Schools Forum decided to end its funding of supplementary schools. In response, it was advised that 'resident impact assessments' are an Islington Council process and the Schools Forum is independent of the council. However, the Schools Forum did take equalities issues seriously.

Supplementary schools were generally run by a small number of dedicated volunteers and it was recognised that a decrease in funding would be difficult for them. It was commented that a significant amount of supplementary school funding was spent on expenses for volunteers.

It was suggested that Islington Council may be able to offer supplementary schools non-financial support, such as access to facilities and resources.

The Committee queried how the educational outcomes of pupils attending supplementary schools could be assessed. It was noted that one supplementary school was registered as a GCSE exam centre and supported pupils in sitting exams, particularly in mother tongue languages not offered by mainstream schools.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report be noted.

**100 SCRUTINY TOPICS AND WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20 (ITEM NO. B5)**

The Committee agreed that its main review topic for 2019/20 would focus on educational equalities and attainment. In particular, the Committee would focus on the attainment gap experienced by Black Caribbean and White Working Class pupils.

The Committee wished for the review to include the relationship between demographic factors, such as protected characteristics, special educational needs and deprivation, and attainment and progress. The Committee would be keen to talk to young people, parents and community leaders as part of the review.

The Committee considered its proposed work plan for 2019/20. The following main comments were made:

- It was requested that the number of teenage pregnancies be included in the quarterly performance report.
- The Committee requested an additional report providing an overview of mental health provision in schools.
- It was agreed that the focus of the February meeting would be on Post-16 Education, Employment and Training. In particular, the committee wished to review the attainment of school 6<sup>th</sup> forms and colleges, the range of courses available and any related equalities issues. It was requested that the Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report be rescheduled to accommodate additional time for the consideration of the post-16 item.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That educational equalities and attainment be selected as the main scrutiny topic for 2019/20;
- (ii) That the proposed work programme be agreed, subject to the amendments proposed above.

MEETING CLOSED AT 8.50 pm

Chair