

London Borough of Islington
Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 29 June 2020

Minutes of the virtual meeting of the Children's Service Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 29 June 2020 at 7.00 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Cutler (Chair), Woolf (Vice-Chair), Ozedmir and Williamson

Also Present: **Co-opted Members:** Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese
Zaleera Wallace, Parent Governor Representative (Secondary)
Claire Ballak, Parent Governor Representative (Primary)

Councillor Vivien Cutler in the Chair

- 165 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. 1)**
Apologies were received from Councillors Graham and Jeapes. Apologies were also received from Councillor Comer-Schwartz, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families.
- 166 **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. 2)**
None.
- 167 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. 3)**
None.
- 168 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. 4)**

RESOLVED:
That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2020 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.
- 169 **CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. 5)**
None.
- 170 **ITEMS FOR CALL IN (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. 6)**
None.
- 171 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. 7)**
None.

172 **ISLINGTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD: ANNUAL REPORT (ITEM NO. B1)**

Alan Caton, the Independent ICSB Chair presented the report which outlined the progress of safeguarding activity locally and outlined how the board would work to achieve its strategic priorities in the coming year.

The following points were made in the discussion:

- The board had been adapting to new ways of working under the COVID-19 restrictions. Weekly virtual meetings had been held and recovery plans were in progress. Partnership working had been working well.
- More work would be done to see if there were any safeguarding variations between different demographics and if so how these could be addressed. It was suggested that more could be done to attract people from different backgrounds to the board and consideration would be given to how the board could better represent the wide diversity in Islington.

The Committee thanked Alan Caton for his attendance.

RESOLVED:

That the Islington Safeguarding Children Board's Annual Report be noted.

173 **QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT - Q3 & Q4 2019/20 (ITEM NO. B2)**

Carmel Littleton, Corporate Director - People presented the performance reports for Quarters 3 and 4 2019/20.

The following main points were made in the discussion:

- Work was taking place to narrow any attainment gaps widened as a result of COVID-19. Careful tracking was taking place and there would be a particular focus on catching up. There were high expectations, schools would be held to account and data would be scrutinised.
- The council had committed to ensuring that all young people in Islington benefited from 100 hours of experience of the World of Work by age 16. There had been a lot of work with secondary schools to achieve this. Although currently only four primary schools were signed up to the programme, a launch had taken place in January and good progress had been made since then with 14-15 schools. Although this was delayed with COVID-19, it would be programmed into the next academic year.
- In response to a question from a member of the public about whether any demographics were affected more than others, it was reported that the data was a year old; however there had been a focus on exclusions and as a result there had been significant improvements especially in the Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) grouping. A report on this would be submitted to the next meeting.

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 29 June 2020

- There was a need to focus more on persistent absence. A focus group had been set up. A consistent approach was required. Schools would have to remind parents of the legal requirement for their children to attend school.
- Concern was raised about parents who did not speak English being unable to home school their children during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was reported that groups were being targeted for summer learning. Close relationships were being established to provide help and information on activities that were taking place and could help their children.
- Data suggested that the attainment outcomes of a child with English as an additional language (EAL) depended on the age at which they joined the British education system. There was a minimal impact if they joined by age five but the impact was greater if they were older when they joined. Officers would be suggesting to schools that they could purchase an App that would help parents of children with EAL.
- In response to a question from a member of the public about whether the council sent out any information about predicting grades of BAME young people, an officer advised that when it had been decided that summer 2020 exams would be cancelled and instead grades would be predicted, the council spoke to headteachers to ensure the process would be robust. Teacher assessment worked well when well moderated. Senior leaders had been contacted and would be held to account.
- Concern was raised that some children who did not have a laptop or the internet would not have been working during lockdown, an officer stated that the council had bought 400 laptops and Chromebooks and had received laptops from the Department for Education (DfE) at the beginning of lockdown. [The number of laptops received from the DfE was confirmed as 1,424 after the meeting.] Schools had also lent laptops where they could. Home learning packs had been sent to schools to distribute to those without the internet at home. In total this contained 11 weeks of work and 6 weeks of summer learning. Schools had been asked to sign up to survey work. There had been a significant improvement rate in the NEET (not in education, employment or training) percentage in the last year and work had been continuing throughout lockdown with schools and colleges to ensure a smooth transition.

The Committee thanked officers for attending and for all their work during lockdown.

RESOLVED:

That the performance report be noted.

174 **OFSTED INSPECTION REPORT - MARCH 2020 (ITEM NO. B3)**

Laura Eden, Director of Safeguarding presented the report.

The following main points were made in the discussion.

- 'The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families', 'the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection' and 'overall effectiveness' had all been rated as 'Outstanding'. 'The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers' had been rated as 'Good'.
- A member of the public asked if any of the Youth Councillors were care leavers. He was advised that currently no youth Councillors were care leavers. Most care leavers who wanted to participate in policy and influence service delivery locally and nationally usually joined CAIS – the children in care council.
- An action plan had been produced to address the two areas for improvement outlined in the report.

Laura Eden was thanked for her attendance and officers were congratulated on the inspection result.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

175 **EQUALITIES IN EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES - DRAFT SCRUTINY REPORT (ITEM NO. B4)**

The Chair presented the report and advised that a foreword had been added since the draft recommendations were submitted to the February 2020 meeting.

The following points were made in the discussion:

- Once agreed, the report would go to the July 2020 Executive meeting to note, then the Executive member would work with officers and there would be a report back at the Executive in November 2020.
- It was suggested that the report could be contextualised regarding the recent Black Lives Matter movement. The Chair stated that the report referenced understanding the history of communities and officers stated that the context would be included in the action plan. An afterword could provide further context.

The Chair thanked all those who had attended to give evidence.

RESOLVED:

That the report be agreed and that the final approval of the report after the inclusion of an afterword be delegated to the Chair.

176

COVID-19 UPDATE (ITEM NO. B5)

Carmel Littleton, Corporate Director – People gave a presentation on how services had been reshaped to respond to COVID-19, the potential impact and lessons learned and the transition to recovery plans.

The following main points were made in the discussion:

- New and remote ways of working had been implemented.
- Schools had remained open for vulnerable pupils and children of critical workers who had been encouraged to attend.
- The council had obtained laptops for those without access to one.
- Some families were worried about job losses, prospects and finances. There were also concerns about digital exclusion and the widening of the attainment gap. There had been particular concerns about Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) families due to the disproportionate health impacts of COVID-19 on the BAME community.
- During lockdown the youth offending rate had decreased and youth workers had found they were able to engage with young people virtually. Social work visits and counselling were taking place online and feedback was that many young people preferred communicating virtually to communicating face to face. Care leavers previously had a visit once every two months but virtual visits were taking place every two weeks. Partnership meetings had been better attended since they had been conducted virtually.
- Work was taking place which focussed on the re-engagement of young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) as having been NEET for a sustained period of time could make re-engagement harder. The council's youth hubs would be opening in July, there would be bespoke online activities and virtual work experience was being considered.
- Mental health support was being put in place and staff were being trained in dealing with bereavement.
- The murder of George Floyd had shown the importance of cultural competence.
- A young employability and skills team was being recruited.
- A session had been held with headteachers to help them support the transition from Year 6 into secondary school and work was taking place to support the transition from Reception to Year One.
- In response to a member's question about whether parents who were unwilling to send their children to school were being encouraged to do so, the Committee were advised that public health data showed that Islington had the lowest COVID 19 infection rates across London with no new cases in the previous days. Each day more children were returning to school, particularly in the older year groups, and this persuaded others to return, too. Soon children who were currently shielding would no longer be shielding and work was taking place to plan their return to school.

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 29 June 2020

- A member of the public asked whether every school was open and was advised that this was the case. Staff and building risk assessments had been undertaken.
- There would be a further presentation at the next meeting on the plans for the summer and next school term.

Carmel Littleton was thanked for her presentation.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

177

INTERIM WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B6)

The Chair reported that the next scrutiny review topic would be considered at the next meeting. There had been an initial discussion between the Chair, Vice-Chair and officers about the possibility of looking at the strategy underpinning the transition from COVID 19.

RESOLVED:

That Members of the Committee notify the chair if they had any particular areas they would like the review to focus on or if they had any alternative topics to propose.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.00 pm

Chair