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London Borough of Islington

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Monday, 28 September 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held via Zoom on Monday, 28 September 2020 at 7.30 pm.

Present:	Councillors:	Cutler (Chair), Ozedmir (Vice-Chair), Caluori, Graham, Ngongo, Williamson and Jeapes (Substitute) (In place of Woolf)
Also Present:	Co-opted Member	Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese Claire Ballak, Parent Governor Representative (Primary)

Councillor Vivien Cutler in the Chair

189 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Woolf and subsequently from Councillor Bell-Bradford and Zaleera Wallce.

190 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. 2)

Councillor Jeapes substituted for Councillor Woolf.

191 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

192 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2020 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them subject to the following amendment:

Minute 185, bullet point 5 'point of inclusion' to be replaced by 'point of exclusion'.

193 CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. 5)

The Chair stated that she had presented the Equalities in Educational Outcomes report to the Executive and it had been well received. She thanked Councillor Comer-Schwartz for her support and stated that the Leader had thanked the committee for its hard work. The 14 recommendations in the report would be responded to at the next meeting of the Executive. The Chair thanked officers and members. She also thanked Councillor Woolf for his work

as Vice-Chair of the committee, welcomed Councillor Ozdemir as the new Vice-Chair and Councillor Caluori as a new member of the committee.

194 ITEMS FOR CALL IN (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. 6)

None.

195 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. 7)

The Chair advised that public questions would be taken at the end of the relevant agenda item.

196 MEMBERSHIP, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND DATES OF MEETINGS OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (ITEM NO. B1)

Zoe Lewis, Democratic Services, presented the report which set out the membership, terms of reference and dates of future meetings.

In the discussion the following point was made:

- In relation to the terms of reference, the Chair clarified that in the event that a vote was necessary, the co-opted members would be entitled to vote on any item considered by the committee related to education.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

197 EXECUTIVE MEMBER ANNUAL REPORT (ITEM NO. B2)

Councillor Kaya Comer-Schwartz, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families and Deputy Leader, gave a presentation on the work that had been undertaken by Children's Services in the last year.

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

- Children's social care safeguarding services had been rated "Outstanding" by Ofsted.
- There had been investment in the Targeted Youth Service to reduce youth violence, as well as in domestic abuse, and better detection rates.
- There had been positive outcomes in terms of those in education, employment or training.
- Good progress had been made against all the recommendations to reduce exclusions from school.
- Over half of the Fair Futures recommendations had been implemented so far.
- The work of Children's Services had been significantly affected by COVID-19. Schools had been closed except for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers and some year groups in the summer term.
- Together with voluntary sector partners 1,192 food parcels had been delivered to needy families.
- Approximately 3,000 IT devices had been distributed to children and young people.

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- Many services had had to close during lockdown but many maintained contact virtually e.g. safeguarding, Bright Start and work on the digital curriculum for schools.
- Work was undertaken with schools and early years' providers, parents/carers, community partners and Public Health on reopening schools and making them COVID-safe.
- Work was undertaken with community partners such as the Mother Tongue Supplementary Schools to help support BAME parents, children and young people.
- Risk assessments had been undertaken for the safe return of key services.
- Work was being undertaken to support the emotional wellbeing of children and young people.
- Holiday play schemes had been run over the summer and these had been well attended.
- 14,944 lunches had been distributed over the summer holidays to those attending holiday play schemes, adventure playgrounds and Launchpad activities.
- Bright Start picnics for children under-5s and their families had taken place in community green spaces over the summer holidays and these would continue into the autumn. These had included a free Lunch Bunch lunch.
- Work had been taking place to support young people into further education or training following their GCSE and A-Level results.
- The future would be adjusting to the 'new normal'. There would continue to be social distancing in schools. Ongoing and emerging needs included poverty/low income, housing needs, physical and mental health of children and parents/carers, insecure work, children's access to technology and learning at home and having safe spaces to play.
- The importance of public health and the value of prevention and early intervention had been underlined during COVID-19.
- Priorities included getting people back on track, increasing face to face contact, trying to get a testing hub set up in Islington, offering hybrid learning and a recovery curriculum and challenging inequalities.
- As part of the equalities work, actions would be taken forward from the joint study with the Youth Justice Board to address the disproportionality of BAME young people in the youth justice system.
- The mental health and wellbeing of children would be supported through a range of programmes.
- There would be a continued focus on improving EET (education, employment and training) rates.
- Work would take place to increase the number of foster carers in the borough.
- Work would take place on community safety issues for young people.
- A member asked about school attendance figures and was advised that the September 2020 school attendance figures had been above 90%. Nationally the figure was nearer 80%. When figures had been analysed there were no significant differences in terms of ethnicity.

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- In response to a question from a member about the process to gain and distribute devices to young people, an officer stated that the council had put in the request for devices early but it had still taken some time to obtain the devices. In the meantime schools had offered to give out devices they had. Wi-Fi routers were necessary in many cases and dongles had been ordered.
- In response to a question about the emotional wellbeing of staff, Councillor Comer-Schwartz stated that the council had offered support in many ways. There had been a regular survey on staff wellbeing and staff had received an extra day's leave on their birthday.
- A member raised concern about how many people were entering poverty as a result of COVID-19 and not being aware of how to ask for help. An officer advised that support was available e.g. uniform grants. The 'no wrong front door' policy meant that if a parent talked to anyone with the school system they should get access to services without being referred several times.
- A member of the public asked if headphones had been provided with devices as often young people had to share their study space with other family members. An officer would check that headphones had been provided.
- In response to a question from a member of the public about whether libraries were providing study space, an officer advised that the five largest libraries were open. Study space and PCs for public use were available and this space was COVID-safe. Adult learning centres had also been reopened. During lockdown, library van drivers had been redeployed to deliver laptops.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

198

SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT AND PRESENTATION (ITEM NO. B3)

Tania Townsend, Head of Strategic Programme and Strategy gave an introductory presentation.

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

- COVID had heightened the challenges many children and families already faced.
- All communities and every aspect of children's services had been affected by COVID-19. The experiences of children, young people and their families had varied and for some the first wave would have been difficult. A number were vulnerable, suffered from digital exclusion or had poor physical and mental health. Others may have found that relationships improved with quality time spent with families, there was resilience in some families and across communities, many engaged in home learning and found that there were further study or work opportunities.
- The loss of routine may have made re-engagement difficult, there could be more NEETs (those not in Education, Employment or Training), exam results

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could disrupt plans and there could be impacts on mental health and emotional wellbeing.

- Some families suffered from worsening finances, grief related trauma, restricted access to community health, limited access to food and outdoor play space.
- Young carers had missed out on respite.
- The social and emotional impact of COVID-19 could affect childhoods for many months and even years to come.
- COVID-19 exposed disparities between groups of children, young people and their families.
- Professional relationships had been disrupted and the change to using electronic communication had happened quickly.
- There had been increased risk to the workforce of trauma, burnout and fatigue with staff operating under extraordinary circumstances for a lengthy period. Staff had shown flexibility, creativity and determination.
- Potential impacts of the wider system supporting children and young people included: Some parts of the system had been paused or slowed down e.g. family and magistrates courts; there was a reduction in funding and income across the children's sector; there were new ways of working with communities and across public services and there would be a refocus on health and social inequalities, prevention and early intervention.
- Children and young people would be front and centre in recovery, restoring and resetting their support to ensure they were safe, cared for and would succeed in learning and thrive.
- The 'levelling up' of inequalities that affected childhoods and life chances would be important.
- The Chair asked about the report from Ofsted referenced in the Scrutiny Initiation Document and was advised that this report had been requested and would be circulated once received.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Initiation Document and introductory presentation be noted.

199

CHILDREN'S SERVICES QUARTER 1 2020/21 PERFORMANCE REPORT (ITEM NO. B4)

Mark Taylor presented the report which set out performance for Quarter 1 of 2020/21.

In the discussion the following points were made:

- The report was in a new format.
- Some indicators had been affected by COVID-19 and some figures were only reported annually.
- The Chair stated that much of the report was positive, including that early years settings had improved to good and outstanding, that EHP plans were in place and participation rates had improved.
- In response to a question from a member of the public about the number of unique visitors to the music website, an officer stated that she would find out and send the answer to the resident. In general, officers were pleased with the number of families that had engaged with online resources.

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- There were careers online videos and careers leads in every school were working online. Many primary schools used the World of Work as an enrichment tool.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

200

DISPROPORTIONALITY OF BAME YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM (ITEM NO.)

Curtis Ashton presented the report. He stated that he could present the more detailed report to a future meeting. The action plan would be published by 2 October 2020.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the action plan be noted.
- 2) That the report be presented to a future meeting of the committee.

MEETING CLOSED AT 8.55 pm

Chair