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London Borough of Islington

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 22 June 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, 22 June 2021 at 7.00 pm.

Present:	Councillors:	Chapman (Chair), Woodbyrne (Vice-Chair), Convery, North, Ozdemir and Woolf
Also Present:	Co-opted Member	Claire Ballak, Parent Governor Representative (Primary)

Councillor Sheila Chapman in the Chair

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

Apologies were received from Councillor Janet Burgess, Mary Clement and Zaleera Wallace.

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

None.

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

None.

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

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 May 2021 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

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

The Chair referenced:-

- 1) the recent report of the Education Select Committee which identified the underperformance of children from low income white families and the possible reasons for this;
- 2) 420,000 more children in England had become eligible for free school meals since the start of the first lockdown. The Chair stated that government funding would be based on aged data rather than this figure;
- 3) Education Policy Institute (EPI) evidence showed disruption to schools had widened the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. The Social Mobility Foundation Survey of 1,500 disadvantaged families

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indicated that there was a lack of confidence in the grades these pupils would get this year and 52% lacked confidence among these families in their ability to appeal. The EPI were of the view that pupils in their final year of sixth form should be able to repeat the year.

RESOLVED:

That the Chair's report be noted.

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

None.

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

The Chair stated that any public questions would be taken during the relevant agenda item.

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

The Chair reminded members that due to the 2022 local elections, there would only be eight Committee meetings and that the date of the July 2021 meeting had been changed with the meeting now scheduled to take place on 20 July.

RESOLVED:

That the membership appointed by Annual Council on 20 May 2021, terms of reference and dates of meetings of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2021/22 be noted.

257 **SCRUTINY TOPIC AND DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B2)**

The Chair suggested that Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) could be the scrutiny topic for the year.

In the discussion the following points were made:

- The Chair advised the Committee that although it was expected that an Ofsted inspection of SEND would be undertaken, choosing this topic for a scrutiny review could be valuable. It was recognised that the inspection would impact on officers' time and so it was anticipated that some of the evidence gathering for the scrutiny review would not involve officers.
- An officer advised that in addition to the expected Ofsted Inspection, an internal review of SEND was taking place and the scrutiny review could possibly align with this. The review was looking at provision, funding, changing needs, rising numbers and inclusion in schools.
- The Chair asked members to contact her with any ideas about how to focus the scrutiny review.

RESOLVED:

That SEND be the scrutiny review topic for 2021/2022.

258 **QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT (ITEM NO. B3)**

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- In a response to a member's question about the increase in applications for free school meals, an officer advised that this was likely to result in a 6% increase in free school meals which was above the national trend although there was an increase across local authorities. This could level off as the economy recovered.
- In response to a member's question about young people being triaged away from the criminal justice system, an officer advised that triaging took place where low level, non-violent offences had taken place if a young person was referred by the police. Work took place with each young person, focusing on their needs and providing support to prevent escalation. Afterwards some were referred on to agencies who could provide continued support.
- A member asked why there had not been a rise in domestic abuse offences as would be expected during lockdown. An officer stated that although the number of offences had not risen, the complexity and severity levels had increased. The council had become more responsive and had continued to invest. The police now had the best performance on domestic abuse sanctions and detections in the Metropolitan Police Service. Since January 2021, a multi-agency domestic abuse daily safeguarding meeting had taken place.
- In response to members' questions about the stability of placements for looked after children, an officer stated that during the pandemic, there was not a rise in the number of children entering care, but more children stayed in care due to the court proceedings backlog. This was a national problem and London was short of 500 places which meant local authorities had to compete for places. Placement planning work was taking place regionally. COVID had made it harder to undertake matching. To match young people to the right placement, work took place sub-regionally. This meant the council did not have to compete for places and could hopefully find the right placement first time. An officer stated that six companies provided 90% of independent fostering places. Work was taking place with the other 10% of providers to ask them which families could support children and from the list provided, matching could take place. Commissioning work took place with the most complex cases and work took place sub-regionally to help children step down from secure settings. Islington had agreed to invest in a secure unit in London as there currently was not one. Work was taking place on interventions that could reduce some children entering care i.e. specialists working intensively with families.
- A member of the public asked about what was being done to support those who were not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and why the Basket of Indicators had no Corporate Indicator for the section entitled "Delivering an inclusive economy, supporting people into work and financial independence and helping them with the cost of living". An officer advised that the percentage of increase in NEETs in Islington was lower than the London average. In some cases the risk of becoming NEET could be anticipated and work could take place to help prevent it. There was a small group of people who were classed as Unknown. Work took place on the ground to track them, however this

had been more difficult during the pandemic. A separate team worked with those who were 18,19 and 20 years old. The Corporate Indicators were linked to the council's strategic plan. However all other indicators were monitored in the same way with the same level of focus.

- A member raised concern that many of the indicators were just above or below expected performance when it was expected that there would be a larger variance from the target due to Covid. Officers were asked whether these variances would be expected to increase in the next few months. An officer responded that some of the small variances were due to action being taken early on e.g. the increase in re-referral rates after the first lockdown showed virtual assessments had not worked as well as face-to-face assessments and therefore it was decided that no child would be assessed virtually. It was possible that variances could increase in future months but there was an increased focus on assessing data and taking action where necessary. The member thanked officers and paid tribute to the social workers who had undertaken face-to-face work in uncertain times.
- A member asked about the numbers of children missing from care and the reasons. An officer advised that some children stayed out later than they were meant to. The police had brought in a risk assessment to assess whether these children were at risk and how they should be treated based on how children not in care would be treated if they stayed out late. These children were separate from the children who went missing from care. The group of children who went missing from care often stayed in touch with their placements or their social workers. A multi-agency meeting was held within 24 hours of a child going missing from care. Unaccompanied and separated children sometimes went missing before they were 18 years old as they were concerned about what would happen to them once they reached 18. Most of the young people who went missing from care were boys aged 13-17. The officer stated that further details in relation to young people missing from care would be added to Corporate Parenting report that would be submitted to the next Committee meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That further details in relation to young people missing from care be added to Corporate Parenting report that would be submitted to the next Committee meeting.

259

ANNUAL REPORT BACK ON THE EQUALITIES IN EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES SCRUTINY (ITEM NO. B4)

- A member referred to Recommendation 13 and asked which cultural groups were included. The officer advised that schools were being asked to look at the curriculum through a multi-coloured lens.
- In response to a member's question about how Trailblazer sites would work, the officer stated that the Health and Wellbeing Team worked to ensure there was dedicated mental health support in schools with a focus on individuals and ensuring mental health was at the forefront.

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- A member asked to what extent digital resources were integrated. The officer advised that home learning had been useful in the inclusive curriculum. Parents had felt supported and had valued the resources provided. Some of the resources had already been refreshed i.e. Year 5 work so pupils could prepare for Year 6.
- A co-optee stated that she had attended the Governors Equalities and Unconscious Bias training referred to in Recommendation 1 and these had been useful. She asked about the Parent Voice Forum and was advised that this was a new group which met at least every half term. Work was taking place to increase the diversity of the group. The forum brought groups together and the local authority could hear about parents' views on successes and potential improvements and provide support to parents.
- A member stated that schools could opt in or out of curriculum suggestions and asked how the council could encourage them. An officer replied that schools could choose their curriculum and how to teach it and although this was not in the local authority's control, the local authority engaged in discussions with schools. It was important for the council and schools to have an engaging relationship and work in partnership to find solutions.
- In response to a member's question about the "scaffolding up" approach, the officer advised that this had replaced the "differentiating down" approach that had been in place previously. There were clear steps in removing adult support and modelling so a child could reach steps independently. "Whole class reading" had been introduced as part of this.
- In response to a member's question about schools mapping their local communities, the officer stated that the Fairer Together Partnership was engaging with schools and was planning to share data with schools so they were clearer about their communities and changing demographics.
- In response to a member's question about who was receiving the tutoring that was funded by the Department for Education, the officer advised that when the Department for Education had issued funding, the local authority provided advice to schools and schools had submitted their plans. This was on track in Autumn 2020, however the last lockdown slowed progress. Demand for tutors was greater than supply and therefore many schools struggled to get an external tutor and instead had used in-house resources.
- A member asked about work to improve diversity on school governing bodies and was advised that a survey had been undertaken and was being analysed. Once ready it would be shared with the People Directorate and governors. It was the responsibility of governing bodies to reflect community diversity. A member commented that she was on a governing body which had struggled to recruit and increase diversity. An officer stated that the council could consider a campaign to encourage people to become governors and make governing bodies more representative of school communities.

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- In response to a member's question and concern in relation to the setting of pupils outlined in Recommendation 6 about whether work was taking place to improve confidence and whether Covid had impacted upon this, the officer stated that the setting of pupils was undertaken by teachers who knew pupils well. Pupils could feel they belonged in a set and would therefore feel confident. The Health and Wellbeing Team provided a comprehensive curriculum which included working on confidence.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

MEETING CLOSED AT 8.30 pm

Chair