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London Borough of Islington
Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 5 July 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Tuesday, 5 July 2022 at 7.00 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Chapman (Chair), Bossman-Quarshie (Vice-Chair), Burgess, Craig, Jegorovas-Armstrong, Ogunro and Pandor

Also Present: **Councillors:** Kay and Ngongo
Co-opted Member: Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese

Councillor Sheila Chapman in the Chair

15 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. 1)**
Apologies were received from Councillor Ozdemir, Zaleera Wallace and Jon Stansfield.

16 **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. 2)**
There were no declarations of substitute members.

17 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. 3)**
There were no declarations of interest.

18 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. 4)**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2022 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them subject to the following amendment:

Item 9 – bullet point 9 – The words 'and changed the nature of that cohort which meant it was likely that outcomes for this group would improve' be deleted from the last sentence.

19 **CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. 5)**
There was no chair's report.

20 **ITEMS FOR CALL IN (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. 6)**
None.

21 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. 7)**
None.

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

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

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

The chair suggested that officers be asked to provide a report back on each of the previous scrutiny reviews that had taken place since 2017.

The chair confirmed that the committee had agreed to undertake a scrutiny view on Making Children Visible. Within this topic there would be mini-scrutinies on those who were not in education, employment or education (NEET), attendance and the voice of the child/family.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the work programme be noted.
- 2) That officers be asked to provide a report back on each of the previous scrutiny reviews that had taken place since 2017.
- 3) That the subject of the committee's scrutiny review for 2022/23 be Making Children Visible.

24 **SEND TRANSITIONS SCRUTINY REPORT (ITEM NO. B3)**

The chair thanked officers for those involved in the scrutiny.

RESOLVED:

That the scrutiny report be approved.

25 **QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT (ITEM NO. B4)**

Jon Abbey, Corporate Director of Children's Services introduced the report.

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

- The Quarter 4 report provided a summary over the year.
- There was encouraging data regarding youth offending. An inspection of this area was expected.
- Attendance data had been affected by the Covid pandemic.
- Islington should be compared against the London figures rather than the national figures.
- In response to a member's question, officers advised that a large number of those the youth offending service worked with had Special Educational Needs (SEN). An educational psychologist had been recruited and worked with the Youth Justice Service three days a week. Work included assessing young people and applying for Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) where appropriate. Those on remand and in secure units were also visited. There was a SEN protocol in place. Social, Emotional, Mental Health (SEMH) was the second largest area of need behind autism and increasingly young people had a dual diagnosis of Autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). There

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were concerns about overrepresentation among those in the youth justice system.

- A member commented that it was positive that the not in education, employment or training (NEET) figure had reduced and asked what work would be undertaken during the school holidays. Officers stated that the Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) was being used to prevent children and young people from becoming NEET. Summerversity would take place in the holidays. There was also a Holiday Activity Fund, a number of different holiday activities were planned and work was taking place to help young people understand the employment opportunities available to them. Upward Bound was a project run through London Metropolitan University. Work was also taking place with the Arts Council to engage cultural partners and provide opportunities.
- A member asked how opportunities including Summerversity were offered to children not in school. An officer stated that as well as brochures being distributed in schools, they were also sent to those who worked with vulnerable children and these children were prioritised for opportunities.
- A member asked if reoffending was a particular problem in any specific areas of the borough and was advised that it was not and there was a general reduction in reoffending rates. In response to a question about preventative measures, an officer advised that a multi-agency plan was in place for these children. This included support in confidence and self-esteem building, help writing CVs, speech and language therapy and emotional support.
- In relation to questions about attendance, officers advised that attendance was high in primary school but lower in secondary school. The Secretary of State had set a challenge of 100% attendance from September 2022 and the government was expecting each local authority to have a plan for provision in place by 2023. Islington's plan would be in place by September 2022. Islington's attendance figures had gone from the bottom quartile of all local authority figures to the top quartile in recent years. There were sensitive arrangements in place for children with medical conditions. Illness was the main reason for absence. Work had taken place with health colleagues to have a school nurse speak to families whose child was persistently absent and this was resulting in improvements in absence figures.
- A member asked how information about opportunities was shared with children from ethnic minority backgrounds and from families with English as an additional language, where they did not attend school or went to faith-based schools out of borough. Officers stated that work took place with communities and supplementary schools and that it was important to keep all young people and their families visible, identify families and address their needs. Community leaders could be advised how they could help families engage. Members, parents, the community and officers could all help to engage families.
- In response to a member's question an officer advised that the percentage of 2-year-old places taken up by low-income families, children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SNED) or who

were looked after had improved and was below the England average but higher than the London average. A new strategy was in place and engagement work was taking place with the community. Everyone had a role in promoting the benefits including playing, learning, developing language skills. The places were for 15 hours per week.

- Work was taking place with community partners, health colleagues and Bright Start. All evidence showed that attending early years settings gave children the best start in life. The council had a target of 76% for 2-year-olds.
- In response to member's questions about home-schooling, an officer advised that there were two groups of parents who home educated - those with philosophical reasons or medical reasons and those who had left school for reasons not related to education. Parents were legally required to assure the local authority that the home education was satisfactory, but no minimum hours were set and there was no requirement to comply with the national curriculum. During covid, the numbers being educated doubled and some of these were from vulnerable families. It was expected that these figures would return to pre-covid levels but this had not happened in Islington or nationally. Work took place to look at the quality of the offer and the safety of children and there was annual contact or more frequent contact where appropriate. These children were also flagged with health colleagues. The government was introducing requirements for a register and for local authorities to keep those families informed. The register would include those being flexi-schooled, children in alternative provision or in unregistered schools.
- In response to a member's question about the alternatives to home-schooling, an officer advised that alternatives were school, New River College and there was a range of alternative providers. Schools could commission vocational training. Some young people required flexibility, some were unable to cope in full time education or had issues relating to health and wellbeing. Schools applied flexibility where required and tried to keep children in school and carefully nurtured those who needed it. To keep children in school the schools had to be inclusive. This would be addressed through the SEN Strategy and Education Plan.
- In response to a member's question about Children's Services identifying young carers, an officer advised that schools usually identified young carers through soft information picked up through observations. A member commented that sometimes parents were concerned that their children would be taken away from them and therefore had a distrust of the local authority. An officer stated that it was important that all services were vigilant and awareness training was important. Work on the carer's strategy was being implemented. There was also a young carer's contract and members could be provided with more information.
- In response to a member's question about how families could be encouraged to send their children back into school, an officer advised that although the local authority could not stop parents from home-educating their children, these families could be monitored. From

September 2022 an ex-headteacher would be employed to meet parents and discuss their individual circumstances and options. The chair stated that as part of the committee's scrutiny review, attendance would be considered.

- In response to a member's question about the cost-of-living crisis, an officer stated that early help teams would work closely with communities and advice organisations. Families could be helped with managing their finances, practical help, supermarket vouchers were provided over the holidays for those on free school meals as well as families on universal credit but who were not eligible for free school meals and there were activity programmes in the holidays which included a lunch being provided. For the under 5s, childcare costs were based on income.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That members be provided with more information on the young carer's contract.

26 DRAFT EDUCATION PLAN AND DRAFT SEN STRATEGY (ITEM NO. B5)

Jon Abbey, Corporate Director of Children's Services introduced the item. He stated that the documents were mindful of the manifesto commitments and young people would be at the centre. The documents would be brought back to the Committee in the Autumn.

Sarah Callaghan, Director of Learning and Culture gave a presentation on the draft Education Plan.

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

- There were nine key pillars, each with an ambition statement and in the document there was contextual information about each one.
- Key priorities would be delivered through collaboration.
- The chair stated that it was important to ensure that outcomes were measurable as some of the ambitions were targets and aspirations rather than actions.
- The council always aimed to work with all schools including Academies. This included in relation to attendance. Secondary headteachers were meeting each other and relationships were being improved.
- In response to a member's comments that there were some outstanding secondary schools in Islington but perceptions of parents could be improved, an officer stated that social media should be used more and every school should be challenged to be the best it could be. It was important to maximise information, advice and guidance to parents and promote equity and excellence. In relation to place planning, there was a need to ensure Islington schools were competitive and parents had choice. Good relationships were being built with schools. The chair stated that historical perceptions may no longer be accurate and it was important to help change the narrative and the way people spoke about Islington's offer.

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- In response to a member's question about innovation, an officer advised that innovation was the opportunity to build on strengths, drive educational excellence and have high aspirations for every young person regardless of their starting point.

Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services gave a presentation on the draft SEN Strategy.

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

- The strategy built on work already achieved to improve outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- The strategy was jointly developed with children and young people, parents and carers, schools and partners. It supported the inclusion of all children and young people in Islington.
- The strategy outlined a programme of work for the next three years involving a wide range of services and providers, with schools and education settings being partners in ensuring transformation.
- There were four main ambitions: 1) Fully inclusive education for all; 2) Right support in the right place at the right time for parents and carers; 3) Equity and excellent education provision; and 4) All young people are well prepared for adulthood.
- Many of the recommendations in the committee's SEND Transition review had informed the draft SEN Strategy.
- The chair stated that the committee had struggled to hear from parents from ethnic minorities and those with English as an additional language so it was important their views were captured in the strategy work.
- A member commented that members were often in schools and could champion the good work taking place.
- In response to a member's question about activities for SEND children in the school holidays, the officer stated that the budget for short breaks for those with the most severe and complex needs was strongly protected and there would be a full offer over the summer holidays.
- In response to a member's question that some parents were not aware of the summer holiday activities offer, the officer advised that if parents searched for the SEND Local Offer on a search engine, they would find detailed and comprehensive information. Work was taking part with Communications to promote this. It was important that when parents of children with SEND signed up for holiday activities, they advised providers about their child's needs so that the providers could contact the council for support.
- Joined up work was taking place with the five authorities in North Central London.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the presentations be noted.
- 2) That the Education Plan and SEN Strategy be brought back to the Committee in the Autumn.

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MEETING CLOSED AT 9.15 pm

Chair

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