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London Borough of Islington

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 18 October 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Tuesday, 18 October 2022 at 7.00 pm.

Present:	Councillors:	Chapman (Chair), Bossman-Quarshie (Vice-Chair), Burgess, Craig, Jegorovas-Armstrong, Ogunro, Ozdemir and Pandor
Also Present:	Councillor:	Ngongo
	Co-opted Members:	Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese Zaleera Wallace, Parent Governor Representative (Secondary) Jon Stansfield, Parent Governor Representative (Primary)

Councillor Sheila Chapman in the Chair

- 27 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. 1)**
None.
- 28 **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. 2)**
None.
- 29 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. 3)**
None.
- 30 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. 4)**
RESOLVED
That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 July be confirmed as a correct record and the Chair be authorised to sign them.
- 31 **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RESPONSE TRACKER (ITEM NO. 5)**
RESOLVED:
That the scrutiny committee response tracker be noted.
- 32 **CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. 6)**
None.
- 33 **ITEMS FOR CALL IN (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. 7)**
None.
- 34 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. 8)**
None.
- 35 **EXTERNAL ATTENDEES (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. 9)**

None.

36 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER ANNUAL REPORT (ITEM NO. B1)**

Councillor Ngongo, Executive Member for Children's Services presented her Annual Report.

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

- Thanks was given to the late Carmel Littleton, former Corporate Director of Children's Services for her commitment and leadership, bringing Children's Services to where it was today.
- There had been a separation of Children's and Adults Services with recruitment to new children's senior leadership including the new Corporate Director, Jon Abbey.
- The Executive Member was visiting schools with the Corporate Director, Children's Services and the Director of Learning and Culture.
- A member asked for the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic figures for the uptake of early years places. An officer stated that these figures would be obtained.
- In response to a member's question about whether the Lifelong Corporate Parenting Task and Finish Group included any backbench councillors, the Executive Member stated that the group reported to the Corporate Parenting Board which included backbench councillors.
- In response to a member's question about the roll out of laptops to Year 7 pupils without one, an officer advised that all secondary schools had been contacted to see who needed one and they would receive them after half term.
- A member commented that children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities might need specific IT programmes.
- In a response to a member's concern that fines could be issued for school non-attendance to families in poverty, an officer advised that this was a last resort and a multi-agency approach was used to address the issue. Sometimes the non-attendance was related to circumstances outside a parent's control and sometimes there was a safeguarding issue so it was important to consider context and act on a case-by-case basis.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That officers report back on the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic figures for the uptake of early years places.

37 **MAKING CHILDREN VISIBLE SCRUTINY REVIEW - SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT, INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION AND WITNESS EVIDENCE (ITEM NO. B2)**

Jon Abbey, Corporate Director of Children's Services, presented the Scrutiny Initiation Document.

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

- The scrutiny initiation document was outlined.

- The young person's voice was paramount.
- The review would look at disproportionality, challenges, opportunities and developments.
- The chair informed the committee that an updated Scrutiny Initiation was included in the second despatch of papers for the meeting and that members had suggested the following further additions:
 - Speaking to young carers, care leavers, foster carers at their coffee morning, parents and carers of 2-4 year olds and parents and carers that used the charity Home Start as well as care experienced young people and their pathway to education, employment, training and housing.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Initiation Document be agreed subject to the amendments listed above.

38 CORPORATE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SERVICES - VERBAL UPDATE - PROVISIONAL SCHOOL RESULTS (ITEM NO. B3)

Sarah Callaghan, Director of Learning and Culture presented the provisional school results.

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

- Islington's Plan for Education 2023-30, School Place Planning 2022-25 and the SEND Strategy 2022-27 were three documents being launched together to drive educational excellence.
- Challenges relating to data included: - 1) significant variability of outcomes across each phased group; 2) children entitled to free school meals were the most impacted by the pandemic; 3) ensuring schools used all of their available resources to fill the gaps created by the pandemic and that these resources had a sustained impact; 4) all schools were good or better.
- The Education Plan focussed on reducing exclusions, improving attendance, improving outcomes for the most at risk, improving the uptake of places for 2-year-olds and driving educational excellence for all.
- There would be a core offer for all schools, delivered through Islington Professional Partners. This would create a culture of support and challenge using the strengths and resources across the borough.
- 65% children achieved a good level of development at the end of Reception which was near the national figure. The figures were not comparable to previous years as there was a new framework in place.
- The phonics results had dropped from 84.4% in Islington to 76.6% in 2022. 20 more pupils achieved the expected standard compared to the national average.
- At Key Stage 1 in 2019 76.3% of children achieved the expected standard of reading. This had dropped to 71.4% in 2022 but was above the national average. 83 more pupils achieved the expected standard compared to the national average.
- Work would be undertaken to get back to the position pre-pandemic.

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- Adjustments in relation to the impact of the pandemic had been made to secondary results but not primary results.
- At Key Stage 2, the percentage of children achieving the expected standard in combined reading, writing and maths was 62.1% compared to the 58.7% national average.
- Further data analysis would take place.
- Schools were being targeted for support, tracking would take place and Islington Professional Partners would help deliver support.
- A network of schools had been set up and this provided opportunities to share best practice.
- 70.2% of Islington school pupils achieved a grade 4 or above in English and Maths in 2022. This was seven percentage points higher than in 2019.
- 52.5% of Islington school pupils achieved a grade 5 or above in English and Maths in 2022. This was over ten percentage points higher than in 2019.
- The proportion of Islington school pupils who achieved three or more GCSEs at the highest grades (7+) increased from 25.0% in 2019 to 31.9% in 2022.
- There was much variability in GCSE results between Islington schools.
- The Islington School and College Leaders Network had been set up to shared good practice.
- Islington schools had seen considerable improvements in A-Level grades in 2022 with 25% of entries receiving A*-A grades, up from 16.3% in 2019.
- Members commented that the variable results between schools could be due to several factors e.g., demographics of pupils, financial resilience of schools, post-covid surge in mental health issues.
- A member asked if the council wrote to parents of children eligible for free school meals before transitioning to Year 7. An officer advised that although there was a universal primary offer, the council still monitored who was eligible and there would not be a sudden transition point from primary to secondary school. The council wrote to eligible families and assisted families in completing forms. Some eligible families would not accept free school meals and more consideration could be given to how accepting them could be encouraged.
- A member commented that the 71.6% of pupils at the end of Reception achieving a good level of development in the prime areas of communication and language, physical, personal, social and emotional development was positive given that the year started with covid in the community and many of these children came from deprived homes.
- A member commented that in the context of dealing with covid-related issues such as remote learning and ensuring all pupils had laptops, the results were largely positive.
- In response to members' questions, an officer advised that the School Organisation Plan looked at the quality of the education offer, ensuring schools offered a diverse curriculum and work would be taking place to rebrand the historical perceptions of some schools. The School Organisation Plan would strategically manage the approach to falling

rolls starting with a focus on educational excellence. Early help was one of the pillars in the Education Strategy, so support was put in place around families and intervention took place where there were issues.

Another key pillar was culture.

- Councillor Ngongo stated that many parents did not feel comfortable talking at large parent forums and as schools were in the community, it could be more beneficial to work in schools to obtain the voices of children and parents.
- Some schools were going into deficit budgets and were being supported to apply for grants and bid for funding. Further opportunities to access funding and grants could be explored.
- In response to a request for a breakdown of school result data, an officer stated that this would be provided in the new year.
- In response to a member's suggestion that measuring value added could be useful, an officer advised that this took place.
- In response to a member's question about how schools with lower grades were being supported, an officer stated that more tracking was taking place, targeted interventions had been put in place and schools had been supported to improve. Eligible schools could use the National Tutoring Grant to target individual children. Governors could be helped in how best to support their school.
- In response to a member's question about projects in place to drive improvements, an officer advised that there was an aspiration that every child had at least one qualification built into the Education Plan, with the 14-19 plan outlining pathways to employment including a vocational offer. Headteacher briefings took place, libraries offered reading challenges and reducing exclusions was one of the six priorities in the Education Plan.
- Councillor Ngongo stated that core funding had been used to help the mother tongue supplementary schools support young people in their own communities.

RESOLVED:

That the provisional school results be noted.

39

CHILD PROTECTION ANNUAL REPORT (ITEM NO. B4)

Jon Abbey presented the Child Protection Annual Report.

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

- The Annual Report covered the period April 2021 to March 2022.
- As of March 2021, Islington Safeguarding and Family Support Service worked with 980 children in need and 357 children looked after children which 21 were disabled children and 57 were Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), 582 care leavers and 188 children with child protection plans. 61% of child protection plans are due to emotional abuse or neglect. Characteristics of parents whose children had child protection plans include domestic violence and abuse, adult mental health, and adult alcohol or substance misuse. Child protection plans were not closed until all the professionals involved were satisfied that

sufficient progress had been made. Parents could be required to sign a contract to improve the situation in a set time and if not, they could be taken to court.

- Children of Black Caribbean and Mixed backgrounds were over-represented across all Children in Need, Child Protection and Children Looked After groups, Black Caribbean and Black African young people were over-represented in the care-leaver cohort. Work has been focused in the year on reducing the disparity across the Safeguarding services and with the Islington Safeguarding Children Partnership.
- There had been a successful Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) inspection and Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services framework (ILACS).
- In response to a question from a member as to why some young people were placed more than 20 miles outside London, an officer stated that this could be for safety reasons, sometimes secure, specialised or mental health placements were required and there were no suitable placements in London.
- In response to a member's question about placement instability, an officer confirmed that a one-night placement would count as a placement move.
- In response to a member's question about participation groups, an officer stated that there was a young people's forum where young people chose the discussion topics, a Children in Care Council and other participation groups.
- In response to a member's question about disproportionality of foster carers, an officer stated that there had been an intensive campaign. It was important that children from different backgrounds were aware of their culture and social workers worked on this and undertook life story work. Recently all foster carers had been phoned to thank them for their work and show appreciation.
- In response to a member's question about the police and social care having seen a large increase in young people being stopped with "prescription" drugs, an officer stated that there was a service funded by public health to deal with alcohol and substance misuse and this service reached out to young people across the borough.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

40

QUARTER 1 - PERFORMANCE REPORT (ITEM NO. B5)

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

In response to members' questions the following main points were made:

- The percentage of eligible 2-year-olds taking up their Free Early Education Entitlement had increased. This was one of the pillars in the Education Plan. A range of strategies had been used to increase the take-up. Data had shown taking up Free Early Education Entitlement improved educational outcomes.

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- The percentage of good and outstanding early years settings had decreased slightly. There were approximately 250 settings so the figures could change quickly. Two settings had gone from good to requiring improvement and one setting had gone from good to inadequate. Work was taking place with these settings. Childminders with no children on roll had to be recorded as less than good. Challenges within Early Years settings included a shortage of staff which had been exacerbated by Brexit, it being a low paid sector and more agency staff being used. These were all national problems.
- Although the Corporate Indicators relating to 13-25 year olds had decreased, the number of contacts had increased, the council had been able to keep youth hubs open during the pandemic for the vulnerable. There had been a resurgence in the numbers of those engaging and it was hoped this would continue.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

41

WORK PROGRAMME (ITEM NO. B6)

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be noted.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.20 pm

Chair

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