

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 29 November 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Tuesday, 29 November 2022 at 7.00 pm.

| | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|---|
| Present: | Councillors: | Chapman (Chair), Bossman-Quarshie (Vice-Chair), Burgess, Craig, Jegorovas-Armstrong, Ogunro and Chowdhury (Substitute) (In place of Pandor) |
| | 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

42 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. A1)

Apologies were received from Councillors Pandor and Ozdemir.

43 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (ITEM NO. A2)

Councillor Cinko-Oner substituted for Councillor Ozdemir and Councillor Chowdhury substituted for Councillor Pandor.

44 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM NO. A3)

There were no declarations of interest.

45 MINUTES (ITEM NO. A4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2022 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

46 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RESPONSE TRACKER (ITEM NO. A5)

RESOLVED:

That the report tracker be noted.

47 CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. A6)

The Chair reported that an evidence session had taken place with Matthew Blood, Head of the Virtual School, the visit to Arsenal in the Community would take place on 2 December and after this visit, she would be attending a celebration for Care Leavers.

The Chair reported that this would be the last meeting for Jo Collins, Operational Lead for Children and Young People Services, Whittington Health and Zoe Lewis, Democratic Services. They were thanked for their work.

48 **ITEMS FOR CALL IN (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. A7)**

None.

49 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. A8)**

None.

50 **EXTERNAL ATTENDEES (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. A9)**

None.

51 **MAKING CHILDREN VISIBLE SCRUTINY REVIEW - WITNESS EVIDENCE (ITEM NO. B1)**

Jon Abbey introduced the presentation.

In the introduction, the following main points were made:

- The aim of the review was to assess the way the council worked to improve the visibility of vulnerable children and ensure that there were equitable processes and inclusive practices that enabled the voice of these children and young people to influence the support and services for them to thrive.
- The objectives of the review were:
 1. To further understand and consider the current and future challenges for these children and young people and how the council was responding;
 2. To explore how support to attend school, learn and prepare for the world of work could be strengthened for children with a social worker, care-experienced young people and vulnerable young people;
 3. To assess how the voice of children and young people could be strengthened across the children's system to further influence the planning and delivery of support and services, in equitable and inclusive ways.
- The scope of the review and evidence to be received would include:
 1. The disproportionality and disparities for these children;
 2. The challenges, opportunities, and developments to improve the visibility of children and the voice of the child/young person identified by the young people and families themselves, and professionals working in Islington;
 3. The current support and pathways for identified groups of children and young people at risk of invisibility to the wider children's system e.g. elective home education, within the virtual school, post-16 education, employment and training and;
 4. Different models of child/youth voice and influence approaches and an exploration of how this could be more effective, inclusive and achieve change.

Akeel Ahmed, Assistant Director Community Learning & Libraries gave a presentation on Young People who were likely to become Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).

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

- Under the Raising the Participation Age (RPA) legislation all young people were required to be participating in some form of education,

training or employment with training (EET) after they had complete compulsory education until they turned 18. This could be in school, college or through work-based learning. Keeping young people actively engaged helped young people develop skills, raise aspirations and develop as members of society.

- RPA also required local authorities to reduce the number of young people whose status was NEET or not known.
- A vision in the Islington Education Plan: 14-19 was to reduce the number of NEET young people by developing a collaborative, 'Team Islington' approach to early identification and intervention.
- Currently the number of Islington's 16 and 17 year olds not in employment, education or training was 1.9%, which was greater than the London average of 1.5% but below the national average of 2.4%. This represented an increase of 0.2% on last year.
- Analysis over four years of Year 11 leavers from Islington schools showed approximately 1.4% of the school roll went on to become NEET in the year they left school.
- The current NEET indicators fluctuated each year but there was a consistent over representation of those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), SEN Support needs, children who were educated at home (EHE) or in alternative provision (AP) and looked after children (CLA).
- A Task and Finish Group had been convened to shape and develop a new model for identifying young people becoming NEET. The findings were that:
 - 1) the current Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI) were very generic and did not take into account local issues or the prevalent characteristics of those most likely to become NEET;
 - 2) RONI indicators were currently applied in Y11, at which point the council's progress team provided additional careers information, advice and guidance to assist with post-16 transition. However this intervention was too late to have a lasting impact on the outcome for that young person;
 - 3) schools were aware in Key Stage 3 of those who raised concerns and were demonstrating behaviours akin to those most likely to become NEET post-16 years old;
 - 4) schools were delivering some excellent programmes and initiatives to support their most vulnerable pupils but lacked the capacity to expand this work or resource it full time;
 - 5) the needs of those most at risk were varied, meaning a targeted and proportionate approach was necessary;
 - 6) parental engagement was essential to improving outcomes for these students;
 - 7) many at risk students were home educated and received limited or no careers guidance.
- A new set of NEET indicators would be drawn up, looking at Islington's NEET data from the last four years and would be developed through a weighted score.
- A No NEET pilot was being run with St Aloysius and Beacon High schools. This involved working with Year 10 at risk of NEET students (as identified using the new RONI) at St Aloysius and Beacon High, with existing work continuing with Year 11 students. There was also wider interest from other schools as well as the Department for Education.
- Adopting a test and learn approach, the pilot would be reviewed in Jan, April and June 2023 with recommendations made for the 2023/24 academic year.

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 29 November 2022

- The programme would then be rolled out to younger year groups and additional schools with the ambition of a No NEETs programme in all secondary schools by the academic year 2024/25.
- The intervention would be a combination of intensive careers information, advice and guidance sessions with a qualified Progress Advisor and world of work activities curated for individual pupils and groups. The level of support and activity would vary based on the identified risk level.
- One of the key takeaways from the task and finish group was how challenging parental / carer engagement could be for at risk of NEET pupils
- Engagement with parents and carers to support young people was essential but could be very challenging as many of these families had experienced a breakdown in their relationships with schools and the local authority, meaning there was a lack of trust.
- Parent and carers were often the primary influencers when it came to young people's aspirations and decisions about post 16 education and employment, so identifying effective methods of engagement was crucial to improving outcomes.
- Closer collaboration with cross council departments was needed to support this area of work.
- In response to a member's question, an officer advised that the figures in the Education Plan differed from the figures in the report as the ones in the Education Plan combined those not in Education, Training or Employment (EET) and not known.
- In response to a member's question about how many NEETs there were currently, an officer stated the figure was approximately 70.
- In response to a member's question as to why St Aloysius and Beacon High schools had been chosen for the pilot, an officer stated that the service had engaged with these schools previously. There was however, a view to extending the programme.
- A member suggested that young people and their destinations should be tracked to ensure that the reduction in NEETS translated to an increase in those aged 18 in education, employment and training.

Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services gave a presentation on Elective Home Education.

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

- Elective Home Education (EHE) was the term used by the Department for Education (DfE) to describe education provided by parents at home, rather than providing education for their children by sending them to school.
- Many Islington parents were providing successful home education. However, home-educated children were not observed or monitored with the same frequency as children in school, there was the potential for EHE children to be invisible and isolated, and for safeguarding concerns to go unnoticed. To counter this view however, recent research conducted by a home educator and based on information returned by 132 Local Authorities suggested that home educated children were approximately twice as likely to be referred to Social Care services, but five times less likely to be made the subject of a Child Protection Plan. Far from being 'invisible', the researcher therefore argued that home-educated children were being 'over-scrutinised'.

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 29 November 2022

- Parents, and not the state were responsible for ensuring their child was properly educated. This did not have to be undertaken through attendance at school however.
- There was no legislation that dealt specifically with home education. However, Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 provided that the parent of every child of compulsory school age should cause him or her to receive efficient full-time education, suitable to age and aptitude etc. either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.
- Elective home education was a form of 'education otherwise than at school' and this piece of legislation was the basis for the obligations of parents. There was no definition in law of 'efficient', 'full-time' or 'suitable'.
- The local authority (LA) had no formal powers or duty to monitor the provision of education at home. It did though have a statutory duty (under s.436A of the Education Act 1996) to make arrangements to enable it to establish the identities, so far as it was possible to do so, of children in its area who were not receiving a suitable education.
- Much Elective Home Education was a positive choice made by parents for philosophical reasons. However, in a significant number of other cases, it might provide an expedient solution (sometimes temporary) to a particular issue faced by the parent or the child (e.g., COVID-19). The most common reasons locally included:
 - the parent wanted to educate their child in a way that they thought was best, in line with their own social or religious philosophy;
 - the child had been unhappy at school;
 - the child was not allocated a place at the school of choice. In these cases, parents might view elective home education as a stop-gap measure or, possibly, a way of applying pressure on the Local Authority to provide the place they sought;
 - the parents were dissatisfied in some way with the school the child was previously attending e.g., bullying or perceived failure on the part of the school;
 - the parents wished to avoid a potential prosecution for poor school attendance or to avoid exclusion.
- There were no legal requirements for home-educating parents to have any specific qualifications, have premises equipped to any particular standard, teach the National Curriculum, make detailed lesson plans, give formal lessons, mark work, formally assess progress, or match school-based, age-specific standards.
- Parents who choose to educate their child at home must be prepared to assume full financial responsibility for their child's education, including bearing the cost of any public examinations. Locally, the council provided assistance to home-educating families for public examinations, but this was discretionary.
- Local authorities could consider giving support when special educational needs were being met through home education and additional costs were incurred as a consequence of those special needs. Assistance was discretionary.
- Locally, information and advice was provided (including links to on-line resources and support groups) for home-educating families but again, this was discretionary.
- The council also employed an EHE Adviser who would contact / visit families at least annually. There was also a dedicated 'school' nurse for EHE children.
- The numbers of children being electively home educated rose significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic and peaked at 280. Although

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 29 November 2022

they had been expected to decrease post-pandemic, they had only recently started to slowly reduce.

- Over 50% of those being electively home educated were female. In any other vulnerable group, girls were underrepresented. There had also been an increase in girls experiencing anxiety and other mental health issues. Black African young people were also over-represented.
- A member raised concerns that if visits were undertaken annually, any pastoral concerns might not be identified.
- In response to a member's question, an officer stated that early intervention was important.
- A member requested a breakdown of the figures. Officers would provide this.
- In response to a member's question about how many young people being electively home educated returned to formal education, higher education, further education or employment, an officer advised that although this information was not held, it could be useful to have. In addition, it could be useful to know how many electively home educated children sat public exams and their results. Although families did not have to share this data, some would.
- In response to a member's question, an officer stated that many parents electively home educating their children enrolled them in clubs where they had social interaction with others and looked to broaden their experiences.
- A member asked about the proportion of children being electively home educated who had severe learning needs. An officer advised that this data would be held where a child had attended school previously. This figure would be sent to members.
- Members were advised that a discussion took place with each family who wanted to electively home educate their child where the requirements were explained and parents and they were advised they could return to formal education in the future. An assessment of the proposed programme also took place and statutory action could be taken if it was considered that the programme was not suitable. Advisors would also see the child and their work. Returning to school could take place in as little as 10 days.
- An officer stated that there was an increase in those being electively home educated because they were unhappy in school. There was a need to explore and try and reintegrated these children back into school.
- Schools were suffering financially and every child out of school was a reduction in funding of £4000 per year.
- In response to a member's question, an officer stated that as part of the scrutiny evidence gathering, officers would facilitate members talking to those who were being electively home educated and their parents.

Laura Eden, Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support gave a presentation on disabled children within the social care system.

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

- Data was gathered from Islington social care records and from the SEN Education Service to explore whether there was any evidence to support the hypothesis of disproportionality that Asian families with a disabled child who lived in Islington were more likely to receive a lower

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 29 November 2022

cost service than other families and were also less likely to access an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

- The fact that 5.1% of those Children and Young People (CYP) at SEN Support who were known to social care were from the Asian-Other ethnic group, whereas only 1.9% of all pupils at SEN Support were from this ethnic group, was statistically significant.
- 3.4% of those CYP known to social care with an EHCP were from an Asian ethnic group was significantly lower than the 6.7% of all those with EHCPs from an Asian ethnic group.
- Analysis of national research alongside local data concluded that families from Asian communities were less likely to be engaged with services to ensure their children's SEND needs were met. Those with an Asian child were more likely to have a personal budget of a lower amount.
- The draft Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) action plan and outcomes had the following aims:
 - 1) To ensure children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) from Asian communities were aware of SEND support services and Personal Budgets and access this support when in need;
 - 2) To ensure that children from Asian communities with SEND were engaged with via Early Help or Children's Social Care at the earliest opportunity so that their needs were met, and that intervention was provided at the earliest opportunity;
 - 3) Only 10% of total cohort of Children with a Disability (CWD) accessing a personal budget were of Asian heritage and this cohort also accessed the lowest financial banding for personal budgets, so there was an aim to increase this by 15% by the end of 2023 and also increase banding of personal budgets;
 - 4) Only 3.45 % of CWD with an EHCP of Asian heritage were accessing a Children's Social Care SEND support service, so there was an aim to increase this to 7% by the end of 2023;
 - 5) Only 3.7 % CWD with an EHCP of Asian heritage were accessing an Early Help service so there was an aim to increase this by a further 5% by end of 2023.
- A consultation questionnaire for Parent Carers has been drafted and would be distributed across Asian community organisations, Parent Carers groups and parents of CWD. The feedback from this questionnaire would be collated and analysed.
- The service had reached out to relevant organisations.
- The information currently available on the Islington SEND local offer webpage was updated to ensure it was accessible for all families and that published information was available in different languages for Islington's Asian communities. A review of the information currently available on the Islington SEND local offer webpage was being updated to ensure this was accessible for all families, particularly published information in different languages for Islington's Asian communities.
- An engagement meeting had been held with Minority Matters Somali Women's Parent Carer group and as a result a SEND co-produced

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 29 November 2022

family information pack was being drafted for Somalian families and discussions were taking place to create a SEND Somalian parent carer group. A CWD Asian Parent carer group would be created and practitioner links agreed for Asian Communities.

- Co-production meetings were being held with Asian Parent Carers and Asian community representatives to consult on drafting culturally specific and sensitive SEND information for families.
- Diversity training was planned in 2023 for practitioners to further develop their practice skills and become more culturally competent to support families of CWD.
- An equality, diversity and inclusion section would be added to the statutory social work Children and Family Assessment in order to capture children and young people's lived experience of inequality and discrimination and how the team around the child could support and empower families to challenge inequality and overcome these barriers.
- A 12-month review of SEND data would be completed to explore if there had been any impact and increase in engagement with Asian families accessing Early Help or Children's Social Care support.
- Families were being supported to use resources already available to them and access services they did not know about.

Gwen Fitzpatrick, Head of Bright Start and Community Wellbeing South, Islington Council and Jo Collins, Operational Lead for Children & Young Peoples Services, Family Nurse Practitioner and Looked After Children, Whittington Health gave a presentation on Early Childhood: Seldom Head Groups.

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

- Children who did less well at five were:- five times as likely to end up being excluded by the end of primary school; over twice as likely to have had contact with children's social care at age eleven; nearly three times more likely to be struggling with reading at eleven; and four times more likely to be struggling with writing at eleven.
- Research suggested that high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) could have positive and long-lasting impacts on children's outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children. However, recent UK data suggested the evidence of actual benefit was more mixed. Positive benefits were dependent on several factors, including the quality of care and parental engagement (UK Parliament 2021).
- Pre-school provision could have positive impacts on early childhood cognitive and non-cognitive skills. This was particularly true for children from disadvantaged backgrounds when quality was high and provision was accessed at a young age and for a sustained period.
- Although 93% of three and four-year-olds accessed their 15 funded hours a week in 2019, the most disadvantaged families were least likely to take-up their places. Take-up was also lower among children from some ethnic minority backgrounds, and among children with English as an additional language and those with SEND (Nuffield 2021). In

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 29 November 2022

Islington there was lower take up within the Somali and Turkish communities.

- There were currently 71 care experiences young people in Islington who were parents. 46 were mothers and 25 were fathers.
- Over the last three years, 87 families had accessed priority early learning places under the criterion 'children of parents who are or were previously looked after'.
- Take up of 2-year-old places increased last year due to partnership working with Bright Start colleagues across the universal, early help, education and health sectors.
- Manor Gardens Welfare Trust had undertaken a project to capture the experience from seldom heard groups of Bright Start services. Overall, the average scores were relatively high, showing Islington had good practice in many areas.
- Key perspectives were identified as follows:
 - Services in the UK were often very different to in other countries, and there were services that did not exist in other places – for example the roles of midwife and health visitors.
 - Services were complex and difficult to navigate.
 - Families did not always know that services were free.
 - Families might have an expectation that services were there to check up on them and find things they were doing wrong, rather than there to help. This made them less likely to ask questions and engage.
 - Many families assumed services were not accessible to them in their language.
- The Rees Project aimed to better ensure family engagement with service provision. It identified enablers of change and looked to retain engagement and build relationships.
- The work undertaken so far included:
 - ensuring all materials were available in multiple languages and displayed as widely as possible;
 - holding more events and activities in places families were already engaging;
 - taking services to the community such as Andover Community Centre Bright Start offer and regular family support surgery at Finsbury Park Mosque;
 - having targeted services including Minik Kardes commissioned to deliver outreach and parenting programmes to the Turkish/Kurdish community and Somali parenting programmes.
- In order to retain engagement the following measures had been taken:
 - Cultural awareness workshops were run for staff;
 - There was trauma informed practice awareness;
 - Exploring the use of family outcomes star across partner agencies as a standardized strengths-based measure;
 - Utilising a full range of tools and opportunities to capture the child and parent voice.
- Innovative ways to reach seldom heard groups in the community were:

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - 29 November 2022

- A Gillespie Park event in partnership with Finsbury Park Mosque; Greenspace, Bright Start and Bright Futures-over with 130 children between the ages of 4-16;
 - Coffee mornings facilitated by Manor Gardens Welfare Trust, promoting the early childhood offer including Bright Start;
 - The development of family kitchen champions who co-delivered the family kitchen programme ensuring it reflected the diversity in food and traditions;
 - Young parents stay and play in response to their request to meet regularly with other young parents and their children.
- Next steps would include:
 - having a parent carer panel set up through family hubs and with co-production and engagement at every stage;
 - enhancing the role of parent champions by professional development and opportunities for co-delivery of universal services;
 - embedding a systematic approach to gathering feedback and using it to inform services at a every level;
 - having ongoing targeted and translated marketing of the offer via practitioners across Bright Start and the voluntary sector and parent champions using all communication platforms including videos with parents from the Turkish and Somali communities;
 - data colleagues working with Bright Start to look across data sets, using Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data to identify and work with eligible families within the Stronger Families cohort and within a wider social care cohort;
 - DWP data about eligible families now included email and mobile contacts so these families could be contacted directly and could be encouraged to contact the Family Information Service for support in applying for a place;
 - The Children Looked After health team was co-located with Independent Futures and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services providing a one stop shop for all care leavers;
 - There would be increased visibility of the Bright Start early childhood offer at the Young Parents forum.
 - In response to a member's question, an officer stated that the needs in different areas of the borough had been mapped.
 - In response to a member's question about Bright Start, an officer stated that consideration was being given to broadening the offer to include evening and weekend sessions.
 - Family hubs were working to improve engagement with fathers and families where parents were LGBT.
 - An audit had taken place of all 73 care leavers and it was found that a good service was being provided and care leavers were being referred where appropriate.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the presentation be noted.
- 2) That members be provided with the Ofsted report from the recent visit.
- 3) That members be provided with a breakdown of figures in relation to children being electively home educated, to include those with severe learning needs.

52 **QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT (ITEM NO. B2)**

Jon Abbey, Corporate Director – Children's Services presented the report.

In the discussion, the following main points were made:

- Members raised concern about persistent absenteeism. An officer stated that this figure was higher than last year, although was lower than statistical neighbours. Persistent absenteeism was a national concern and there was new guidance out to address this. Targeted interventions were taking place and every school was being visited each term to talk to staff about attendance. Every school's attendance was ranked. Data was being used to provide more focussed support. The Virtual School now supported those who had a social worker.
- In response to a member's question about progress with permanent and fixed term exclusions, an officer stated that this work was on track.
- In response to a member's question about the Summer reading challenge, an officer stated that uptake, age range and disproportionality would be considered as part of the Library review.
- In response to a member's question, an officer advised that 7 out of 10 GCSE pupils had a positive progress 8 score. More maths and science support was required for the 3 out of 10 pupils who did not. The baseline had now been re-established and the service was looking at exam boards to see where links could be strengthened.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

53 **ANNUAL REPORT BACK ON THE TRANSITION FROM COVID-19 SCRUTINY REVIEW (ITEM NO. B3)**

Candy Holder, Head of Pupil Services presented the report.

In the discussion, the following main points were made:

- It was noted that Targeted Youth Services offered free counselling for any child aged 12 or over in the borough. An officer advised that this service was for young people up to the age of 21 and was funded by Public Health. Each young person would be allocated up to 12 sessions.
- In response to a question about the 11 by 11 programme uptake, an officer advised that that the uptake was on target. Work was taking place with cultural organisations to try to extend the current offer so that more schools would take part in the programme.
- In response to a question about the government's tutoring funding, an officer stated that this funding brought greater flexibility and was for any child falling behind in reading, writing or maths.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

54 **EDUCATION PLAN (ITEM NO. B4)**

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

In the discussion the following main points were made:

- In response to a member's question, officers explained that the creativity in the plan was about delivering educational excellence whilst supporting schools to be financially viable. Consultation was currently taking place on the amalgamation of Copenhagen and Vittoria schools. This would help deliver excellent education outcomes.
- In response to a member's question, an officer stated that there were currently 10 supplementary schools. The council would have to think creatively about how to continue to support them by pooling resources as government funding had been cut.
- In response to a member's question, an officer advised that Appendix G of the report contained six priorities including reducing fixed term exclusions and persistent absence. As part of this the ethnicity, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Free School Meals eligibility would be considered and individual schools would be supported.
- In response to a member's question about the 100 hours of work take up and catch up, an officer advised that this was in the remit of the Youth Employment Services team so there were direct links with the wider youth offer. There was a focus on creative industries and officers were looking to review the indicators. Members could be provided with a breakdown of figures.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That members be provided with a breakdown of figures in relation to the 100 hours of work programme.

55 **SEND STRATEGY (ITEM NO. B5)**

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

56 **WORK PROGRAMME AND FINAL SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT (ITEM NO. B6)**

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme and Scrutiny Initiation Document be noted.

MEETING CLOSED AT 9.15 pm

Chair