

London Borough of Islington
Children's Services Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday, 25 April 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on Tuesday, 25 April 2023 at 7.00 pm.

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

Also Present: **Councillors**
Co-opted Member Mary Clement, Roman Catholic Diocese
Zaleera Wallace, Parent Governor Representative (Secondary)

Guests

Councillor Sheila Chapman in the Chair

94 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (ITEM NO. 1)**
Apologies were received from Jon Stansfield and the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families, Councillor Ngongo

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

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

97 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM NO. 4)**
Councillor Jegorovas-Armstrong an outstanding action in the minutes of meeting held on 20th March 2023, in which members were due to receive further information on the Safer Schools Protocol.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20th March 2023 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

98 **CHAIR'S REPORT (ITEM NO. 5)**

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

100 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (ITEM NO. 7)**

101 **EXTERNAL ATTENDEES (IF ANY) (ITEM NO. 8)**

102 **SCRUTINY REVIEW - DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS (ITEM NO. B1)**

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The Chair of the Committee, Councillor Chapman thanked members who attended evidence gathering visits as part of the scrutiny review into Making Children Visible and expressed gratitude also to the young people who spoke to members.

Councillor Chapman also informed the Committee that it was at the suggestion of the Head of Strategic Programmes and Strategy, to field some of the recommendations to the relevant body, rather than all to the Executive, and cited examples of recommendations being directed at the Education Board.

It was also noted by Councillor Chapman that themes emerged from the evidence, such as continuity, awareness of offers, the means in which the Council engages with partners, and the possibility of alumni schemes. There were also areas in which the Council needed to consider new pathways for young people.

Councillor Jegorovas-Armstrong seconded the thanks provided by Councillor Chapman, highlighting that it had been shown that Islington's young people had awareness of important matters and current affairs, particularly through the utilisation of social media, and that it was up to the Council to be providing greater support to them. It was also emphasised that the first recommendation on creating a home educated needed to be as consultative as possible, and the Councillor also sought to offer a word of caution that whenever bespoke solutions were created, the system should be more inclusive.

The Director of Children's Services, Jon Abbey, thanked the Chair and all members of the Committee for their work, engaging with the local community and meeting families. Members were told that officers were keen to learn what the feedback provided by the community was. The suggestion from the Head of Strategic Programmes and Strategy about spreading the recommendations beyond one directorate was again highlighted for praise. On recommendation nine, the Director for Children's Services highlighted that this was positive that Islington were at the forefront on this matter and that it made him reflect on a similar stance taken by the London Borough of Camden. Overall, the Director of Children's Services told members, that for marginalised children and the opportunities and visibility of young people, members had arrived at recommendations that address this and officers will review and learn from them.

RESOLVED:

That the draft recommendations of the scrutiny review into Making Children Visible be agreed by the Committee.

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ISLINGTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD - ANNUAL REPORT (ITEM NO. B2)

The Chair of the Committee thanked officers for providing members with the detailed report and invited officers to address the key points. This was delivered primarily by the Independent Chair of the Islington Safeguarding Children Board (ISCB), and the points addressed were:

- The safeguarding arrangements are led by three statutory partners and the role of the Independent Chair was to oversee that and the work done as a partnership. There is currently an excellent partnership with Islington in seeking out its most vulnerable children and providing them with the best services.
- The leadership of the service itself is led by the three statutory leads. This includes looking at what the challenges are for the future such as transitions, children who are being exploited, providing services to vulnerable groups at the earliest opportunity.

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- Serious violence, knife and gun crime remain a concern. The Youth Violence Strategy is testament to cross-partnership working with agencies.
- There was good engagement with schools, and this was something that was particularly done well in Islington. The board works with their subgroup to address the effectiveness of safeguarding in schools and the actions taken from it.

The Director of Safeguarding & Family Support, Laura Eden, noted the importance of trauma informed practice and how the Council engages with children and young people and families, highlighting that it wasn't a matter of children and young people not engaging with the Council, but more the Council services not engaging enough with them. The rate of transition from early help to social care intervention has been approximately 1 in 10 families, for the past five years. Members were told that the duties of the London Safeguarding Procedures have been extended, but there was also the ability to offer six sessions, and that some young people who don't participate in the return interview would have engaged with other services.

The Chair referenced pages 10 and 11 of the report concerning the joint area for SEND inspection, which happened at the back end of 2021, highlighting that given eighteen months had passed since the inspection, it would be useful to have an update. In response, officers told the Committee that this was embedded in detail within the SEND strategy. Members were told that exclusions were down – including children with SEND – and the Council was working closely with our health partners to look at other ways of dealing with preventative services. These challenges were being experienced nationally, members were told, but things were improving but slowly

The Director of Children's Services added that inclusive practice will always be focused on in Islington. There were challenges around the backlog of therapy assessments, and within school they were holding a lot of that need. Together with parents, schools and partners, Inclusive schools aim to build additional resource provision.

Members were also told that children and young people are accessing services earlier, benefitting from intervention before mental health issues escalate.

When asked by the Chair of the Committee what gaps they foresaw, the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding board told the Committee that they were worried about neglect; statistics showed that 29% of children were now living in poverty which was significant, as was the link between neglect and abuse; other potential gaps included the rise of domestic abuse, access to mental health services and transitions which members were told were all issues that the partnership was aware of. Members were told the partnership worked well as a multi-agency operation and actively sought to use learning of past tragedies across the country in the work going forward, such as greater information sharing and feedback; and that the aim was to be as ambitious as they could in supporting children and young people

In response to members of the Committee who voiced concerns that there is distrust among some members of the local community regarding social services leading to the potential of some children falling through the net; and the follow-up question of how reflective the workforce is of the community – particularly for whom English is a second or other language – members were told that the workforce was reflective of the population. However, in terms of social services, it was different because of the disproportionality in need, which leads to disparity. In early help services, there was disproportionality for most global minority groups.

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It was expressed by members of the Committee that in some communities, social pressures such as shame and embarrassment prevented some families from coming forward and seeking help from Council services, highlighting that there was a long waiting list for call backs on SEN assessments which didn't help matters. In response, members were told that there was a long waiting list for autism diagnoses, however, cited that once a young person was accepted onto a diagnostic pathway it can take up to eighteen months to complete, and that it wasn't that nothing was happening in the intervening period, but that it may take that time to reach a conclusion. It was then noted that this was a universal experience, compounded by staff shortages.

In response to questions from the Deputy Chair of the Committee concern Community regarding the creation of an internal programme to help children with mental health, similar to CBT, which other boroughs have done; members were told that it was absolutely right to look at alternative forms of interventions. Members were told that statistics showed significant waiting lists for CAMHS. Members were also told that there are programmes commercially and locally developed, but this would be a matter for colleagues in health services and that a joined-up approach to development and pathways was needed. It was also added by the Chair of the Committee that the Director of Young Islington had informed her of counselling referrals for children over 12 as a stopgap.

ACTION:

At the request of the Committee, members are to be provided with additional data concerning the number of children who are identified as Asian and are at Risk of Child Sexual Exploitation.

In response to questions from the Committee, about whether there was anything central government could be doing more of, the Director of Children's Services told members that in Islington, 38.2%, of children were living in poverty. The cost-of-living crisis had been alluded to in the report and some of recommendations from the care review addressed the matter. It was fortunate that the Council made significant investments in children's services and officers valued this and the representations made by members on behalf of the service for additional funding. The Director of Safeguarding & Family Support added that it would be a matter of concern if there were not a high number of children in deprivation on a care plan. Members were told that the government has made a commitment for childcare, but it was not yet known what it entailed or if it would genuinely cover cost. Islington's rate for out-of-borough SEND placement was 1.6% compared to an average of 6%. Some authorities experiencing a deficit were being asked to take children off Education, Health & Care Plans, so it was testament to Islington's management of funds that it was not in that position.

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UPDATE ON SUPPORTED INTERNSHIPS (ITEM NO. B3)

The Committee were presented an update on Supported Internships, the report which had been circulated to members in the agenda. Key highlights from the discussion included:

- The programme was highly successful
- The ambition was for a council led internship programme that provided work based learning opportunities to people; currently the programme tended to use a lot of support for internship programmes.
- The programme had experienced a boost recently owing to a grant from the Department for Education (DfE). Officers only learned of the grant in October 2022 and the first tranche of money has been spent. The DfE was contacted today to say how it was spent.
- Conditions included an employment forum and an action plan.

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- The programme was looking to learn from other local authorities who were taking a similar approach such as Hounslow and Hackney.
- All previous participants on supported internship programmes have been contacted. All five people from the 18/19 cohort are fully employed. Participants have also been contacted regarding their journey and a tracking sheet has been created to capture this. A report with analysis will also be created.
- The programmes referred to included:
 - Project Search Whittington Hospital
 - Project Search Moorfields Eye Hospital
 - The Autism Project - Care Trade
 - Project Search – Great Ormond Street Hospital
 - Royal Mencap Society
 - Transport For London (Steps Into Work)
 - Project Choice (Health Education England)
 - GLL Leisure Centres (Steps into Work)
- There was a big offer, full with opportunities, but not all avenues were full. Some of the opportunities may even be suited to young people who were more entrepreneurial. The issue was getting awareness out there.
- Many supported internships resulted in roles being taken up in hospitals, leisure, transport, as well as traineeships.
- Working group set up and will meet soon
- There needed to be greater mental health support for young people, particularly those transitioning from the safety net of school into the wider world.
- We have an employment forum, and we are working to develop that and make that more a focus on supported internships. Including partners such as HR and Comms. Celebrating success is key to getting the information out there.

Members were told that there was support from job coaches to do something called systematic instruction, which entailed breaking down responsibilities down into steps until that young person was competent to undertake it independently; job coaches would be supplied by a college as they needed to be trained to a professional level, and officers were trying to get ahead of anticipated demand increase further down the line.

Members were told that it was important to match the aspiration and skills with the right jobs; it was highlighted that Islington had many opportunities and one of the programmes was working with several schools on taster days that were much more focused and in depth than world of work., identifying and focusing on what that young person can do. Members were also told that cross-directorate working with Council officers in culture and employment divisions was in progress to boost publicity and capitalisation of the opportunities.

In response to suggestion from members of the Committee regarding partners in technology from the south of the borough who may want to be involved, particularly concerning artificial intelligence and other areas of technology, members were told that this was important and being looked into. There was anchor institutions such as the Institute of Physics where partnerships could be expanded.

Members of the Committee also noted the possibility of utilising graduates and advocates to establish an alumni network that only not promote the offer, but also provided continued form of support.

ACTION:

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The Committee to be provided with the full report and will be on put on the 2023-24 work programme to be presented to members in the later stages of the 2023-24 municipal year.

MEETING CLOSED AT 8.42 pm

Chair