

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 22 October 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 22 October 2024 at 7.00 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Ozdemir (Chair), Jegorovas-Armstrong, Cinko-Oner, McHugh, Ogunro, Pandor, Zammit, Susie Graves (Co-Optee), Mary Clement (Co-Optee), McNeill (Co-Optee) and Turpin (Co-Optee)

Also Present: **Councillors:** Safi-Ngongo and O'Halloran

Councillor Gulcin Ozdemir in the Chair

32 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)**

Apologies were received from Councillor Bossman-Quarshie.

33 **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)**

Councillor Convery substituted for Councillor Bossman-Quarshie.

34 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)**

There were no declarations of interest.

35 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)**

Officers noted an error in which the HM Inspectorate of Probation was referred to as the HM Inspectorate of Prisons.

Members noted that there was an omission of a question clarifying whether the data incorporated the borough's Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

Members suggested revised wording to the point concerning the definition of off-rolling to clarify that it was not a verbatim citation of the official definition used by the Department for Education (DfE).

RESOLVED:

That subject to the amendments above, the minutes of the meeting held on 10th September 2024 can be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

36 **CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)**

37 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A6)**

Questions from members of the public were answered during the discussion of the item of the agenda that they related to.

The Chair advised that in recent weeks, the committee had received several detailed questions from residents and members of the public that were beyond the scope of what could be answered at a scrutiny meeting, and that the committee could not accept questions that were not related to the items for discussion this evening, but that depending

on the scope of the information being requested, members of the public may be redirected to raise issues as casework with their local ward councillor or as a question to the relevant Executive Member at the next meeting of Full Council.

38

ISLINGTON CARE LEAVERS AND HOUSING PROTOCOL (Item D1)

The Director of Housing Operations and Executive Member for Homes & Neighbourhoods were in attendance to present the item and take questions, in addition to the Executive Member for Children, Young People & Families and officers from the Children & Young People service. In the discussion, the following points were raised:

- The Islington Care Leavers and Housing Protocol was a joint protocol between the Homes & Neighbourhoods directorate and the Children & Young People directorate. The protocol had been put to the Homes and Communities Scrutiny Committee for comment and was endorsed at their meeting of 26th September 2024 and had now come to this committee for comment and endorsement.
- Officers thanked members for promoting the development of this protocol and requesting the item come to the committee for comment. Commendations were also paid to the collaboration of officers between the Homes & Neighbourhoods and Children & Young People directorates.
- The Council had purchased twenty buy back properties specifically for young people between the ages of 18 and 24.
- Officers had also utilised revenue funding to bring in Housing First Co-ordinators to support those children in the accommodation to ensure no one becomes homeless.
- Consultation on the protocol had been undertaken with young people, members of the Homelessness Forum, Ministry of Housing and directorates across the council.
- The protocol aimed to ensure that no young person leaving looked after care becomes homeless and are supported as soon as it is apparent that they are facing difficulty. Officers stated that the Council could not be complacent in this regard.
- The protocol was also stated to ensure that no care-experienced young person is categorised as having made themselves intentionally homeless, and that they are not evicted from council properties for rent arrears.
- Islington was the first local authority to implement a no local connection criteria.
- Officers stated that the protocol was radical and would be constantly reviewed with all stakeholders.
- The Executive Member for Children Young People & Families paid tribute to officers in Housing services, Children & Young People services and the Executive Member for Homes & Neighbourhoods, and stated that consideration needed to be given to disabilities when allocating properties
- Officers stated that within the last twelve months, only four of the one bed properties adapted for wheelchairs, had been let. Officers further stated that the winter months would be challenging, as decreased lettings and an increase in patients discharged from hospital, add to constraints. It was stated that generally, there were 18% more on the housing register than there were available properties.
- The Executive Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods stated that everything will be run jointly with Children's Services, that the Council had listened to young people, and encouraged members to be honest in their feedback also.
- In response to members questions regarding how Young Person's Advisors' work is set out and monitored, officers advised that they would work within the Council's

leaving care service, Independent Futures, and have a manager that can support and advise them on improving practice. Officers further stated that goals will be set within the pathway plan, and that advisors will adhere to the practice model.

- Officers stated that much work was put into preparing young people for adulthood and ensuring they were not left unsupported after 25, feeding into the Council's Lifelong Corporate Parenting mission.
- In response to questions from members concerning rent arrears and council tax exemptions for care leavers that were aged 25 and over, officers advised that if the funding was available, this would be explored and that young people had expressed that this was an issue.
- Officers stated that regarding rent arrears, Housing services met regularly with Children's Services to ensure that no young person leaving care fell into arrears on Council tenancies. Officers further stated that Housing would continue to support care-experienced young people after 25 and to not consider them under the intentionally homeless category at any stage.
- In response to members concerns and feedback about care-experienced young people having to confirm their circumstances, officers stated that Housing services would obtain data from Children & Young People services to fulfil their statutory obligations but on some occasions when required, would enquire with the young person directly. Members suggested an Islington looked after passport.
- In response to questions about how the judgement of maturity is made in each instance and how long the judgement would follow the young person, officers confirmed that Children's Services lead on every decision regarding housing care-experienced young people, and that this is supplemented by a person-centred approach from Housing services to address a young person's changing needs over time. Officers also confirmed that Housing services retain information for a maximum of five years due to policy and storage constraints.
- Officers informed members that a restructure was commencing in early 2025 which would reduce the number of properties allocated to an officer, from approximately 2,000 plus to 561, and that each officer will have undertaken intensive training on safeguarding, vulnerability and holistic approaches, equal to that of social workers.
- Officers had supported apprenticeships for care-experienced young people as part of helping them into employment and stated that when the restructure in Housing services takes place, the service would look to take on some of the care-experienced young people that have expressed interest in these opportunities. It was also stated that this support was not limited to internal opportunities and that the Council would support its care-experienced young people to be ambitious and in whatever career aspirations they may have.
- Officers stated that they were flexible within budget provision to the support they could provide in helping to secure private rented accommodation, such as deposits and advance payments in individual circumstances.
- Officers confirmed that they always aim to house those on its register within close proximity of Islington. 50% of homeless families were within the borough, 45% in neighbouring boroughs, and 5% were on the fringes of London. In terms of housing support for young people, officers confirmed that Islington tenants will have an assigned housing officer as a matter of course and that between Housing and Children's Services, appropriate support will be provided.

- The Executive Member for Homes & Neighbourhoods agreed with members recommendations to reinforce in the protocol, the need for trauma informed practice within the protocol and officers were receptive to joint training between Children's and Housing services where needed.
- In response to questions from members of the public regarding whether there was a system by which a young person could for an alternative advisor, officers confirmed that this would be possible.
- Officers will consider members amendments, including changing the wording in the protocol that states Housing Services 'may work with the personal advisor', to say that it will; and reinforcing a 'tell us once' approach in regards to data gathering.

ACTION

Officers to discuss and explore options for Council Tax relief and/or support for care leavers over the age of 25, at the repurposed cost of living board, a Council-wide forum that looks at tackling poverty in the borough.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the amendments above, the Islington Care Leavers and Housing Protocol is endorsed by the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

39

ISLINGTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD ANNUAL REPORT (Item D2)

Officers presented the Islington Safeguarding Partnership Report to the committee. In the presentation and discussion, the following points were raised:

- The Independent Chair's role had changed to become more of a constructive critical friend that oversees the effectiveness of Islington safeguarding arrangements.
- The complexity in cases had seen a notable increase in this reporting period.
- There was a challenge in that there was supposed to be joint and equal funding of child safeguarding practice reviews which falls disproportionately on the local authority. Other challenges included obtaining effective data, addressing inequalities and transitions into adult services.
- The numbers of private fosters were relatively low in Islington and across the country. The partnership worked to ensure that through partner, it was made aware of a child under private fostering.
- Commendations were paid by officers and members to all that helped to pull together this report. Members praised the variety of professionals that were included and that the Council should be proud of the expertise.
- Members noted that the number of domestic violence cases had risen nationally which would pose a risk to children also and in response, officers stated that legislation had changed to specify that children present in these instances are recorded as a victim. It was also stated that in addition to monthly MARAC meetings, a daily safeguarding meeting was held to address these risks. Officers further stated that domestic violence and abuse had been the primary reason for referrals from police into social care and that in terms of child protection plans, it usually fell under the category of neglect. Officers further stated that they were seeking to have a more personable and integrated response to safeguarding and that increased number of reports could be positive in that it could be taken to mean that victims that previously would have not reported instances, are now coming forward.

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- Officers shared the concerns of members that no one should live in fear of abuse or forced marriage and had audited how global majority groups engaged with safeguarding services, stating further that everyone had a duty to refer cases of this happening. It was also stated that a skilled workforce can identify that victims could be anyone, including children that were overachieving academically and/or thriving in school. Officers further informed members that the full training for staff, covered female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and harmful practices, but stated that they were open to suggestions for improvement from members.
- Officers were addressing the need for more trained foster carers, and were looking at reviewing promotional campaigns, but acknowledged the impact of private fostering agencies on being able to recruit foster carers.
- Officer stated that in regard to the electively home educated children open to children's social care, there were complexities to these cases and the partnership was working with education colleagues to address this.
- Members noted that there were disparities, particularly in CAMHS, and requested further information on the ethnicity breakdown of the workforce across the safeguarding partners. In response, officers confirmed that this was one of the key issues that they were looking to address, specifically when delivering the Section 11 report and were considering including within next year's annual report.
- Officers also stated that regarding representation, it was also important to note that in addition to the workforce being diverse it was just as important that the workforce was culturally competent and understanding of the communities that they served.
- In response to members questions about the implications of the disbanding of the Missing Child Adolescent Exploitation sub-group, officers advised that there would be no adverse impact, and would help partners to streamline their work, but would continue to monitor this to ensure that this did not result in an adverse impact. Officers confirmed their commitment to build in extra reviews.
- In response to members concerns about next steps in regard to youth services, officers advised that they are producing an annual impact report going forward which will look at the overall, overarching youth offer in the borough and can be brought to the partnership and committee for review.
- In response to questions from members about what was envisaged by advancing the SEND strategy, officers advised that together with the Executive Member for Children, Young People & Families it was agreed that a partnership approach was needed to identify the issues, and that by early January, there would be a discussion with members around this, and then a summit involving parents and the Department of Education (DfE) to discuss the issue in Islington.
- In response to members concerns regarding increased stress and workloads reported by safeguarding leads, officers stated that staff in schools were dealing with multiple complexities in terms of challenging behaviour and supporting different areas of the school, and that officers would continue to monitor and provide support as and when required. Officers also stated that staff received training appropriate to their work.
- In response to questions from members as to whether My Learning was fit for purpose, officers stated that My Learning did have its challenges which were being overcome and hoped to report increased numbers of usage in the next annual

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report, and there had been improvements since the end of this reporting period (March 2024).

ACTION

Members to have sight of the data breaking down the demographics, specifically ethnicity, across the partnership, when it is ready, in addition to it being included within the next annual report.

ACTION

Officers to provide members with accurate numbers on how many children on social care plans have an education, health and care plan and how many electively home educated children have education, health and care plans.

RESOLVED:

That the Islington Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report is noted.

40

CHILD PROTECTION ANNUAL REPORT (Item D3)

Officers presented the Child Protection Annual Report to the committee. In the presentation and discussion, the following points were raised:

- Officers informed members that at the end of the reporting period in March 2024, there had been 913 children in need being supported by the Islington Safeguarding and Family Support Service; 298 children who are looked after, of which 37 were disabled children and 44 were Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), 765 active care leavers and 181 children with child protection plans. It was stated that there were also eight children living in a Private Fostering arrangement at some point during the year 2023/24.
- Addressing members' concerns regarding the section of the report highlighting the higher proportion of contacts from Police for children from a Black ethnic group, compared to contacts from other agencies, officers expressed concern regarding the figures, also, stating that they are holding the police to account and that it would be good for the Police to answer for the numbers, to members.
- Officers had taken on members' concern around context, and including comparative data for the previous year in brackets to highlight the impact, graphs and/or other appropriate formats.
- In response to questions from members of the public, officers clarified that the data showing that children from global majority groups took on average longer to be adopted, specifically in Black ethnic groups, was for this reporting period (2023-24) and stated that initiatives to address this included the North London Adoption Agency, the Black Adoption Project, and generally identifying more Black and mixed heritage carers and dispelling misconceptions about what is required to adopt a child.

ACTION:

Officers to invite the police and health safeguarding partners in addition to the local authority safeguarding partners at the next annual presentation of this report.

RESOLVED:

That the Child Protection Annual Report is noted.

41

YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE INSPECTION REPORT (Item D4)

Officers presented the Youth Justice Service Inspection Report to the committee. In the presentation and discussion, the following points were raised:

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- Officers told members that previous inspections in 2014 and 2015 had resulted in very poor outcomes for the authority and led to Islington being placed on high priority status.
- Officers and members were pleased with this year's outcome. It was noted that this inspection was more comprehensive than the social care inspection and was a dramatic transformation from the outcome of the previous inspections. Members commended the direction the service was headed towards and paid tribute to the young people, the staff of the Youth Justice Service and also to the service Director, Curtis Ashton, for each of their roles in securing this outcome.
- Islington had scored 34 out of 36, the highest recorded by a London borough. Officers stated that the only other London boroughs to be rated outstanding were Camden and Hammersmith, and the only other local authorities to be rated 36 or higher were Brighton & Hove and East Riding of Yorkshire.
- Officers were pleased that Inspector had accepted the borough's vision and strategy and that Islington remained child focused, and trauma informed.
- Young people were engaged with as part of the inspection process and were spoken to about the quality of service they receive.
- Officers were pleased with the performance regarding court disposals, interventions which had also been rated highly by parents/carers rated highly and resettlements. Only four recommendations had been made and officers committed to reviewing the actions.
- Members noted that the average school attendance of those in the Youth Justice Service was under 45%. In response, officers stated that they recognised that they needed to do more in relation to those children and that the inspectors had noted this also, that although there were low levels of attendance there was a strong wraparound for these young people. Officers stated that they were underlying complexities to this cohort and that they were committed to addressing this and preventing young people being out of school and coming into the remit of the Youth Justice Service to begin with. It was also stated by officers that youth justice workers would work with the schools required and where a young person was excluded from alternative provision would ensure there was education provision in place for them.

ACTION

Officers to update the committee as to whether there is an up-to-date version of the Alternative Provision brochure and advise how families would be able to access this.

RESOLVED:

That the Youth Justice Service Inspection Report is noted.

The meeting ended at 9.36 pm

CHAIR