

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Tuesday, 5th June 2007 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Motley (Chair), Councillor Arnold (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Ahmed, Eniola, Mistry, C J Patel, H M Patel (alternate for Mrs Fernandes), Tullett and co-opted members Mr Lorenzato and Dr Levison.

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families), Ms Cooper, Gill Reed and Mr Vaughan (observers) also attended the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs Fernandes, Mrs Bondzi-Simpson (co-opted member), Rev Stone and Mr Vaughan (observer).

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

There were none.

2. Membership

Noting that some co-opted members had not been attending meetings over the past year, the Chair suggested that the co-opted membership should be looked into.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel held on Wednesday, 18th April 2007 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. Matters Arising

Annual Education Standards Report

Referring to the letter written on behalf of the Panel to all teachers in the borough, Tony Vaughan asked whether this had been sent out yet. In response the Chair confirmed that the letter was sent out shortly after the last meeting.

Children's Centre in Brent

Tony Vaughan also asked whether there was any follow up on whether the Teachers Panel would be granted representation on the Children's Centres steering group. The Chair explained to the Committee that he had followed this up and it was noted that the steering group had ceased to exist. The Chair also suggested that it would be more appropriate to raise any further queries about this at a meeting of the Teachers' Panel.

Extended Services Update

Councillor Mistry enquired as to whether the Funding Officer post had been recruited to. Rik Boxer (Assistant Director, Children & Families) explained that this position had been filled and it was noted that it was based in Chesterfield House. In response to enquiries about consultation with the Teacher's Panel on the guidance for delivery of extended services, the Chair suggested that the guidance might be presented at the next Teachers Panel meeting and asked for this to be followed up should this not be the case.

Impact of PCT Savings Proposals for Children and Families in Brent

Referring to the reduction in physiotherapy services and in particular the impact of this on Special schools, the Chair informed the Committee that the tPCT had not carried out a clinical re-assessment as hoped. However, Jenny Cooper explained that Grove Park and Hay Lane schools had carried out an audit to determine the actual impact of the proposed cuts on teaching staff and resources. The outcome of which suggested that there was in fact a need for more resources rather than a reduction. The Chair suggested that the Committee be presented with this report at their next meeting in July. Committee members also agreed that representatives from Brent tPCT should be invited to the meeting to give their response to the findings.

5. Exclusions from Brent Schools

Before Committee members was a report providing a historical summary of exclusions from Brent schools and the action taken to reduce the number and rate of exclusions. Paul Roper (Head of Alternative Education Services) presented the report highlighting key trends and issues. For example it was noted that the rate of exclusions in Brent at primary school level had remained stable over the years and was considered to be in line with the national average. With regard to secondary school exclusions, it was explained that the number had peaked around 10 years ago and had since stabilised. It was noted that there had been steady increase over recent years; however this was in line with the national trend. Commenting on the provision of services for excluded students, Paul Roper described the service as having effective systems in place. Furthermore he felt confident in the schools' ability to keep accurate pupil records with regard to exclusions. The appeals process was also outlined and Paul Roper expressed the view that the low success rate for appeals demonstrated that schools had been dealing with exclusions in an effective, fair and transparent manner. It was highlighted that four schools in Brent had what was considered to be challenging pupil populations. Referring to this Paul Roper explained that the schools in these areas had been recognised as having good systems in place with regard to managing challenging behaviour.

In response to questions Paul Roper explained that at any one time there would be around 150 young people being provided for through Pupil Referral Units (PRU), Brent Education Tuition Service (BETS) and other alternative provision. The Committee was informed that other provision included schemes such as M

Power, which worked with disengaged Key Stage 4 pupils, and projects offered through the College of North West London. However Paul Roper commented that it was always a challenge to find stable, well staffed and productive alternative education services. With regard to whether there was adequate provision to meet needs and pupil numbers, it was noted there had been a recent audit of provision and alternative education services. It was further explained that a group was looking into the results of the audit and investigating how to further develop the service. The Vice Chair commented that there was need to be pro-active with regard to meeting the needs in the 14 – 19 curriculum, Councillor Arnold suggested that at some point the Committee should receive more information on how this was being achieved and what resources were needed to do so.

The Chair enquired about the impact of the Integrated Service Programme on school exclusions. In response it was explained that it was too early to tell however there were areas where the Integrated Services would have a beneficial impact. For example at secondary school level it was evident that Integrated Services were assisting schools with setting up groups and bringing agencies together in order to co-ordinate support and make it more coherent. Also on an individual level, for example at primary school level, through Integrated Services issues around parenting, housing or substance abuse would be identified and addressed and through sharing information and joining services the programme would benefit and direct support towards individual pupils.

There were questions about the schools with the highest numbers of exclusions. With regard to the City Academy it was noted that there was a significant number of exclusions and it was asked whether this number was comparable to the secondary school that was there previously. Paul Roper explained that the report provided a statistical analysis for the past 5 years however this information could be determined by looking through past records.

Dr Levison, co-opted member, asked about the administration of exclusions enquiring about the stage at which an exclusion was deemed to be an appropriate disciplinary measure. Paul Roper expressed the view that the success rate with appeals indicated that schools had demonstrated good judgement with exclusions. It was noted that the guidelines from the Department for Skills and Education (DfES) were very clear about how an exclusion should be handled. It was also noted that all schools were expected to follow the same procedure thus schools would not have a different set of standards with regard to what should warrant an exclusion. Clive Romain also informed the Committee about the appeals process and it was noted that appeals were heard by a three person independent panel and the constitution of the panel was governed by DfES guidance.

It was asked whether there were any statistics on exclusions of pupils with English as a second language. Mr Lorenzato, co-opted member, expressed the view that language difficulties could have a potential impact on behaviour. In response, Paul Roper explained that statistics were prepared according to categories determined by the DfES, however he acknowledged that it would be of interest to cover this aspect in an audit. Councillor Arnold endorsed this commenting that it would help to ensure that the service was meeting pupil's needs.

A member of the Committee asked whether the availability of PRUs and the centres intended for children with fixed term exclusions made it easy for schools to move around challenging pupils. Paul Roper explained that the service had recognised the potential for this to occur, however there were well defined referral processes to assist with the prevention of this. Furthermore it was added that parents still had the right to appeal if they were unhappy with their situation.

The Chair asked about the areas that could be improved upon. Paul Roper identified two areas. He explained that there existed a group of complex cases involving young people with special educational needs, whereby it had been difficult to find the right context within which to provide for their needs. It was commented that the service would have to look at creative and constructive ways of meeting these pupil's needs. It was also noted that the service had been taking steps towards this and Paul Roper explained that a first step had been to create a post with Connexions responsible for monitoring and tracking alternative provision. Due to the challenging nature of the young people participating in these projects it had been recognised that it was important that someone have the responsibility of monitoring progress both with the young person and project providers in turn this would prevent placements from breaking down. It was also felt that this Alternative Education Placements Officer post could more clearly identify the projects that provided successful outcomes. The other area for improvement was with regard to finding a way to engage young people at key stage 4 in such a way that their commitment and interests were aroused, Paul Roper commented that this continued to be a challenge.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that the Committee be provided with an update on progress with the development of alternative service provision for pupils accessing the 14 – 19 curriculum.

6. **Bullying**

Anthony Felsenstein, Strategic Coordinator for Behaviour and Attendance, presented a report outlining Brent initiatives for tackling bullying in schools. It was noted that bullying was an issue for all school and furthermore it was an issue that was difficult for schools, parents and families to deal with. It was also explained that there was no statutory obligation for schools to report bullying incidents thus it was important to work closely in partnership with schools to monitor the issue. In response to questions from the Chair, Anthony Felsenstein explained that from his experience schools did keep records of incidents of bullying despite them not having a statutory duty to do so.

It was noted that there were several examples of good practice for tackling bullying in Brent schools. A number of these were highlighted such as befriending schemes and mentoring. Methods incorporating the social and

emotional aspects of learning were also highlighted as preventative measures with growing potential.

It was also commented that several schools had effective anti-bullying policies. In response to questions from members of the Committee, Anthony Felsenstein explained that the Local Authority did not keep a central record of the anti-bullying policies for each school. He further explained that the policies were not monitored and evaluated, however some secondary schools had consulted with the Local Authority when drafting their policy. In response to further questions, Anthony Felsenstein commented that he was not aware of any school having explicitly stated measures for dealing with homophobic bullying.

Continuing on the issue of homophobic bullying, Anthony Felsenstein explained that he had begun pilot work with at least one secondary school on tackling this. He added that the DfES had produced a pamphlet on how schools and the Local Authority could work together on this issue. With regard to other projects at a Local Authority level it was explained that the topic had been raised at management meetings. Additionally it was noted that a high profile event was being planned to raise awareness of this issue. In response to questions it was explained that this event would take place later in the summer term, however a date had not yet been set.

Other initiatives highlighted including the establishment of a secondary student anti-bullying council. The group consisted of students from 10 – 14 schools and it was noted that homophobic bullying was an area that the group might cover. It was explained that the group had been established with a view to building on the awareness developed during the National Bullying Week in November and extend it across the year.

Gill Reed, Teachers Panel, commented on the implementation of gender equality and the impact of this on tackling bullying. She expressed the view that there was a lot of sexist bullying in schools also and noted that there were often underlying cultural issues with regard to this. Gill Reed also suggested that the Local Authority could benefit from looking at what the National Union for Teachers (NUT) had been doing in this area. Noting that there had been a recent conference addressing this, it was suggested that any gender equality policy could have targets around bullying.

A member of the Committee asked whether training was being made available for school governors on this issue. Councillor Wharton informed the Committee that this had been raised at the annual conference for governors. It was suggested that it could be beneficial to incorporate information on tackling bullying in governor training workshops or other courses.

There was further discussion about the impact of Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL). It was noted that there were various tools and resources available to assist with the delivery of SEAL. Regarding this, it was noted that at primary school level SEAL was covered in part through Physical, Social and Health Education (PSHE) as well as in assemblies or through various themes covered on a termly basis. It was also highlighted that the feedback at primary school level had been very positive. Paul Roper informed the Committee that SEAL had only recently been introduced at secondary level, he

commented that some secondary schools had developed a creative approach for adopting SEAL and that its delivery could be achieved through cross curricular work.

Members commented on the potential links between exclusions, bullying and youth offending. Paul Roper explained that there had not been many exclusions arising as a result of bullying. The Committee then discussed the issue of bullying that did not occur on the school site. It was acknowledged that this was an area of growing concern that was difficult to tackle as it was not clear at which point a school should take responsibility for a situation.

The Chair thanked the presenter for the report and it was noted that this was an issue that the Committee would continue to take an interest in. Referring to a previous experience as a teacher the Chair commented that homophobic bullying was an issue that deserved to be looked into further and he expressed the view that the Council had the opportunity to take the lead in the area of tackling homophobic bullying and influencing tolerance in schools.

RESOLVED:

(i) That the report be noted.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as being Wednesday, 11th July 2007.

8. Any Other Urgent Business

Work Programme

The Chair noted that Committee members should start to consider topics for further investigation by a task group. However it was noted that the Committee should have just one task group established at any one time. Members of the "Improving Outcomes" task group indicated that they hoped to have their final report completed by the end of July.

In relation to future items to be considered by the Committee it was noted that the Committee would be receiving reports on school places and youth offending at future meetings.

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm

W MOTLEY
Chair