

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 11th July 2007 at 7.35 pm**

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

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families [part]), Mr Vaughan (observer), Ms Jenny Cooper (observer) and Mrs Lesley Gouldbourne (observer) also attended the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tullett.

1. Change of Order of Business

RESOLVED:-

that the order of business be amended as follows.

2. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

Councillor Mrs Fernandes declared a personal interest in *Item 4: Impact of PCT savings proposals for Children and Families in Brent* and confirmed that she would not participate in any discussion on this item.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel held on Tuesday, 5th June 2007 be agreed as a true and accurate record subject to an amendment to the list of apologies for absence which should reflect that Mrs Lesley Gouldbourne was not present and Mr Vaughan was present at the meeting on 5th June 2007.

4. Matters Arising

Tracking

Councillor Arnold enquired about the mechanisms in place for tracking items that had been considered by the Committee, particularly those where actions had been agreed. Stella Akintan (Policy and Performance Officer) reported that items would continue to be added to the annual work programme and followed up appropriately. It was proposed that routine tracking reports be submitted to the Committee for members to review the monitoring of the Committee's outcomes.

RESOLVED:-

that a tracking report be submitted for consideration by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting on 10th October 2007.

5. **Progress on Brent Youth Parliament**

Mohammed Elkhidir, Adesola Sanusi and Ezras Adams (members of the Brent Youth Parliament) were present at the meeting.

Krutika Pau (Assistant Director of Strategy and Partnerships, Children and Families) provided a summary of the report before the Committee which outlined the background to and progress of the Brent Youth Parliament, which held its inaugural meeting in March 2007. Members were advised that between November 2006 and February 2007, 53 children and young people (aged between 10 and 19) from across Brent were elected as Members of the Youth Parliament, including children from Year 6, and representatives from all secondary schools and the College of North West London (CNWL). An annual intake would ensure a renewed membership. To date, two meetings had taken place and the Youth Parliament's terms of reference, work priorities and membership had been agreed, following elections to determine the composition of the parliament.

Ms Pau outlined the meeting, reporting and task group arrangements for the year and commented briefly on the identification of 3 areas of work that had been prioritised by the Youth Parliament for the year: crime and safety, sports and leisure; and health and well-being.

Mohammed Elkhidir, Adesola Sanusi and Ezras Adams (representatives of the Brent Youth Parliament) were then introduced to those present at the meeting.

Mohammed Elkhidir explained that he was very passionate about politics and was therefore pleased by the Council's establishment of the Youth Parliament. Whilst stressing that each of the three chosen work priorities were very important, Mohammed explained that health and well-being was of particular interest as he aspired to find ways to educate and empower young people. He specifically hoped to promote positive youth enterprise. With regards to sports and leisure, it was suggested that whilst there were adequate facilities in the borough they were not being adequately promoted amongst young people.

Adesola Sanusi summarised his route into the Brent Youth Parliament via the Brent Youth Matters 2 Forum (BYM2) and explained that this presented numerous opportunities for young people to feed into the Council's decision making processes. Adesola focussed on the issue of crime and safety which, it was suggested, was a very real issue affecting young people across the borough. He also referred to health and well-being and the importance of addressing issues such as sexual health and teenage pregnancy with young people. Commenting on sports and leisure, Adesola reflected on the potential impact of the 2012 Olympics on Brent and the need to encourage greater participation in sports and leisure activities by young people in Brent.

Ezras Adams reiterated the comments made by his colleagues regarding crime and safety and health issues for young people. He went on to highlight his aspirations to promote the impact young people can have. Commenting on the two meetings of the Youth Parliament that had taken place to date, the Committee was advised that the sessions had proven to be a great way to meet other young people and enabled positive discussion to take place on a variety of issues affecting young people in Brent. Councillor Hayley Matthews had proven to be a great Chair and the Youth Parliament representatives had received considerable support from Eve Baker (Team Leader, Brent Youth Service) and Manveen Patwalia (Principal Youth Participation Manager). Referring to the Youth Opportunity Fund, members were advised that following over 150 applications, all funds had been allocated and feedback about the outcomes had been very positive. It was stressed that as the Youth Opportunities funding was going to end, further funds should be secured in the future, if possible.

Numerous Committee members congratulated the Brent Youth Parliament representatives on their membership to the 2007/08 Youth Parliament and for their positive input at the meeting. Responding to comments made about keeping young people informed; Councillor Mistry queried how momentum would be maintained to keep schools and young people engaged in the activities undertaken by the Youth Parliament. Ezras Adams explained that there would be ample opportunity for young people to feedback with surgeries taking place on the first Tuesday of each month and three full meetings of the Youth Parliament scheduled to take place per annum. Ms Patwalia confirmed that in addition to the Youth Parliament receiving feedback from schools each term, suggestion boxes would be placed in all schools and all school councils would receive reports from every full Parliament session so that they could also link in to the work of the Youth Parliament.

In response to a query concerning the integration of children with special needs into the Brent Youth Parliament and their involvement in those meetings that had taken place to date, Adesola and Ms Patwalia explained that the children had made a positive contribution to the meetings and had not been distracted by the number of people present. Whilst it was acknowledged that communication had been a slight barrier, a support worker had been on hand to maximise participation.

Following a query regarding communication with and the involvement of voluntary groups in the activities of the Youth Parliament, members were advised that over 800 voluntary groups operated across the borough but that numerous forums were being used to speak to the appropriate groups and promote the work being undertaken by, and the role of, the Youth Parliament. It was acknowledged that people needed to be informed about how they could get involved and feed in through existing forums and groups.

Councillor Arnold commented on the Youth Parliament's participation in the recent Respect Festival activities and praised both the Council and the Youth Parliament for the good relationship building activities that had already generated positive results. Following a query regarding how the views of the Youth Parliament would be formally presented to Council, Ms Pau explained that an annual report on the work of the Youth Parliament would be presented

to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive. Regular updates would also be provided to the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board. In response to suggestions that Youth Opportunities funding should be pursued in future years, the Lead Member for Children and Families explained that this central government funding programme had ceased. It was widely accepted amongst members that the funds should be replaced by other available monies and that this issue should be considered further by the Committee in the future.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that the issue of funding for youth opportunities be considered further by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a future meeting; and
- (iii) that the Committee thank the representatives of the Brent Youth Parliament for attending the meeting and updating members about their involvement.

6. Impact of PCT Savings Proposals for Children and Families in Brent

The Chair explained that the accompanying appendix before members had been requested following consideration at a previous meeting of a report concerning physiotherapy provision. As a result of the discussions that took place at that meeting, an audit of physiotherapy provision had been undertaken at Hay Lane School with a view to highlighting the impact of proposed PCT cuts in the broader context.

Ms Jenny Cooper (observer) introduced the appendix before members and explained that the audit had taken into account all work commitments within the school, external physiotherapy time spent and additional support provided by classroom assistants. Following careful consideration of the school timetables and discussions with all those affected by physiotherapy provision at the school, it was clear that the proposed tPCT cuts would have a significant impact and there was serious concern amongst teaching staff and the governing body about the implications at Hay Lane School.

Ms Cooper commented on the current usage of staff within the school and the reality of the staffing levels that were actually needed to ensure that physiotherapy needs were met. Members were advised that a significant amount of provision was already being met by teaching and support staff rather than specialist physiotherapists and that this situation would only worsen as a result of the proposed cuts. Teaching staff were particularly concerned about the likely impact on teaching provision and the situations they may have to confront as a result of conflicting demands. Commenting on the predicted impact of the proposals, it was suggested that physiotherapy would be reduced by 50% at Hay Lane School with the majority of individual treatment terminated. Ms Cooper expressed concern that the physiotherapy role would become largely instructive and that a less hands-on approach would impact on the level of knowledge and support provided to classroom assistants and this could ultimately make the delivery of physiotherapy more complex. The situation could have serious health and safety implications for both teaching staff and

children due to the likely conflict between looking after the children in a teaching capacity as well as having to intervene and provide any necessary medical care.

Following a query by the Chair about the current staffing levels at Hay Lane School and the amount of contact time currently provided per child, Ms Cooper confirmed that the current staffing levels were not adequate to fulfil the required amount of contact time per child. Furthermore, all staff were currently over stretched. It was noted that timetabled activities were not always undertaken on a weekly basis due to shifting priorities. At this point Ms Pau commented on the wider implications of the tPCT cuts and the anticipated impact on Grove Park School, which was already experiencing increasing pupil numbers. Ms Pau expressed concern that a broader audit beyond Hay Lane School had not yet been undertaken.

Phil Church (PCT) advised the Committee that the Primary Care Trust had no option but to make difficult service cuts and identify £25m savings in 2007/08. Over 100 different savings plans had so far been identified for the year, major staff cuts had already been implemented and numerous PCT buildings were being sold off. It was stressed that whilst the PCT was doing all it could to make savings without affecting patient services, services would have to be prioritised and difficult choices made.

Lynda Greenhill (PCT) then went on to update Committee members about the situation following the last Committee meeting and explained that the focus had been on addressing children's clinical needs in the most cost effective manner. The teams at Hay Lane School and Grove Park School had been amalgamated following visits to both schools, in depth discussions with staff and an assessment of service needs which indicated that there had previously been a high level of provision at both sites. The assessment had also indicated that a large number of out of borough pupils were receiving Brent PCT provision and that this therefore impacted on the provision to local children. It was noted that following the amalgamation, there had been on-going discussions with both schools and feedback had been positive. It was stressed that more extensive paediatric provision would be available if necessary and that flexibility and prioritisation of services would not affect the quality of provision. Members were advised that the proposed cuts would not amount to a 50% reduction in physiotherapy provision by September 2007.

Commenting on the need to enhance partnership working with the schools, Ms Greenhill explained that there were a number of challenging issues that needed to be addressed including the need to provide more non-clinical support within the schools in order to reduce pressures on medical staff. It was suggested that additional support from the schools and other agencies to address different issues would enable the PCT to focus on clinical provision and make better use of resources in the future.

Members were advised that the PCT's future proposals had been submitted to the schools for consideration and Clinical Services Teams had been established. It was noted that Impact and Equality Assessments had been undertaken and that all children receiving physiotherapy provision would be

assessed and regularly reviewed to ensure that adequate provision was maintained.

In response to a query from the Chair regarding whether a full review had been undertaken by the PCT after the last Committee meeting in April, Ms Greenhill explained that a formal clinical review had not been undertaken but that following detailed discussions with all involved parties, a number of issues had been addressed and on-going monitoring of the situation was ensuring that feedback remained positive. Whilst acknowledging the Chair's concerns that support was now shared across the two schools and that this may result in a loss of dedicated and informed staff, Ms Greenhill explained that this option provided greater flexibility and ensured more cost effective use of resources. Referring to the Council's responsibilities for education matters, the Chair highlighted concerns that the cuts would have a significant impact on teaching provision.

Lesley Gouldbourne (observer) expressed concern that a clinical assessment had not already been done on each child and queried who would conduct those assessments, which were now anticipated. Ms Greenhill explained that an individual needs assessment on each child was no longer necessary due to the positive debate that had already taken place with the schools and the on-going partnership working, review and monitoring that was planned for the future. Ms Cooper expressed concerns that due to the varying needs of the pupils, an individual assessment of each child was preferable to an overall assessment. Ms Cooper explained that the Hay Lane School report focussed on the impact at the school rather than in the broader context, as referred to by the PCT. Reference was then made to Brent's higher level of deprivation compared to other boroughs and the linkage to children with disabilities. As a result, it was suggested that the historical levels of physiotherapy provision in Brent reflected the complex needs of Hay Lane's pupils and the patterns of deprivation across the borough. Consequently, it was felt that such simplistic comparisons should not be drawn and overall assessments did not accurately reflect the situation at Hay Lane School. Likewise, the learning support workers at Hay Lane School served a large number of children rather than individual pupils, as was often the case in main stream schools. In response, Mr Church explained that benchmarking exercises did take into account demographic considerations and were weighted to some degree to reflect specific circumstances.

Responding to comments made about the need to increase additional teaching support staff in the classroom, Ms Cooper suggested that the assumption was that the school budget would meet the costs of enabling staff to provide all necessary services. It was stressed however that teaching staff at Hay Lane School were already overstretched and the budget would not provide for additional support staff. Ms Cooper went on to query why the schools had not been involved in the undertaking of Health and Equality Impact Assessments and requested that the schools be given the opportunity to consider the outcomes. Ms Greenhill assured the Committee that a number of processes had been followed and that evidence of what action had been taken by the PCT to review and monitor provision and assess the impact of cuts could be provided. It was noted that whilst individual needs assessments were not felt to be necessary, a separate impact assessment could be undertaken if the Committee deemed this to be beneficial.

In response to a query concerning what action would be taken by the PCT if members were not satisfied with the outcome of the Health Impact Assessment, Mr Church explained that the Health/ Risk Impact Assessments would identify the real impact of the proposals. Though not an easy option, if necessary the PCT could develop a Risk Mitigation Plan in order to identify suitable future actions to overcome identified risks. At this point the Chair stressed the need for improved communication and partnership working between the PCT and the schools to ensure that the children's' needs were best met. He then went on to request that the Health and Equality Impact Assessment reports be circulated to members of the Committee so that a position could be taken by the Committee at its next meeting.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the report be noted; and
- (ii) that the Health and Equality Impact Assessment reports from the PCT be circulated for consideration at the next meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting to enable a further discussion on this matter to take place.

7. Improving Outcomes for African Caribbean and Black African Pupils – Task Group Report

Councillor Arnold (Task Group, Chair) provided a brief overview of the activities undertaken by the all-party task group, which was established to investigate and review the support given to African Caribbean and Black African pupils within Brent, an area where it was felt that the Council was not achieving positive outcomes.

Members were advised that the task group's work focussed on educational attainment and therefore there remained a wide spectrum of issues that needed to be addressed including options for breaking patterns of disadvantage and greater consideration of the socio-economic linkage to educational attainment. It was noted that considerable work was being done by different agencies to address issues around educational attainment and that this work should be capitalised on. One such project included the "Born to be Great Charter," which would be circulated in all schools and was already available on the Teachers' website.

Commenting on the task group's recommendations before the Committee, Councillor Arnold stressed the need for regular updates and on-going monitoring of the issues through the Executive. With regard to a recommendation that a Council-wide audit in all service areas be conducted on all the initiatives relating to families and disadvantaged families with under achieving pupils, it was proposed that a less complex approach would be to ensure that all Service Plans across the Council addressed how each unit would contribute to raising outcomes for disadvantaged groups.

Referring to the issue of language provision, especially support for parents of Somali children, the Chair stressed that a recommendation referring to the

provision of and access to language support for parents be included under the "Schools and Parents" recommendations.

In response to comments made by Committee members concerning the need to ensure that improving outcomes remain a major feature on an on-going agenda to ensure that there was an increasingly co-ordinated approach to addressing issues, the Chair suggested that the Brent Youth Parliament could play an important role in promoting issues of this kind and thereafter feed into more formal processes.

In response to queries concerning the level of input from teaching staff and local schools on the issues addressed in the report, Councillor Arnold explained that to date no discussions had taken place or formal feedback sought from teaching staff. As a result it was proposed that the final report be submitted to the Teachers' Panel for wider circulation, comment and feedback. It was acknowledged that teaching staff could provide invaluable feedback and would certainly influence progress of the report in the future following consideration by the Children and Families department and thereafter the Executive.

Krutika Pau (Assistant Director of Strategy and Partnerships, Children and Families) explained that this was a departmental priority and a significant amount of work had already been undertaken to improve outcomes for African-Caribbean boys and Somali children and young people. It was stressed that whilst this issue was high on the department's agenda, consideration had to be given to the resource implications of some of the proposed task group recommendations. As a result of budget pressures and other limitations, there would need to be cross-cutting departmental support for future initiatives.

In conclusion, Councillor Arnold stressed that whilst the focus of the task group report was on achieving positive outcomes for one particular disadvantaged group, it would also have a substantially positive impact on all children.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the report of the Improving Outcomes for African Caribbean and Black African Pupils Task Group be noted;
- (ii) that, subject to the following amendments the recommendations outlined in the task group report, be agreed:-
 - (a) with regard to the recommendation that a Council-wide audit in all service areas be conducted, instead all Service Plans across the Council should be used to address how each unit would contribute to raising outcomes for disadvantaged groups; and
 - (b) that the report acknowledge the need for greater support for parents, especially for those with language difficulties around ESOL and parenting skills;
- (iii) that consultation with teaching staff be undertaken as a priority and the task group report be circulated to schools via the Teachers' Panel for consideration;
- (iii) that the final report be forwarded to the Lead Member for Children and Families for consideration prior to deliberation by the Executive; and

- (iv) that the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee record its thanks to all members of the task group and Stella Akintan (Policy and Performance Officer, PRU) for their work.

8. Primary and Secondary School Places

Carmen Coffey (Head of Communication and Student Support, Children and Families) provided an update for members of the Committee about the sufficiency of primary and secondary school places in Brent and an explanation regarding what action would be taken in response to the increase in reception applications for September 2007. Members were advised that over the past eighteen months there had been increasing pressure on Brent's primary schools and as a result of increased population and migration into Brent, there had been a significant impact on surplus capacity in the borough. Consequently, there were now noticeable shortfalls in reception, primary and secondary places across the borough. Committee members were updated about the actions being taken to deal with the current shortfall in reception places, including the installation of a new portakabin at Wembley Primary School. With regards to tackling the shortfall in secondary places, it was acknowledged that attempts would be made to have Building Schools for the Future Programme (BSF) monies released sooner than 2010/11.

Ms Coffey confirmed that a number of neighbouring boroughs were now also experiencing similar problems and that migration into the borough was a significant issue. Members were advised that 1,300 children had arrived in the borough unexpectedly requiring school places in recent months and compared to 2006/07, there had been an overall net increase in the numbers of new pupils in Brent. It was suggested that in the short term officers were reasonably confident that as a result of various factors, such as opting to send children to school elsewhere, every child requiring a school place in September would be accommodated. It was noted that the majority of children requiring a secondary school place had been offered one, although this was not necessarily in their first choice school. 78 families had been invited to attend an assessment centre at Chesterfield House on 11th and 12th July 2007 to ensure that appropriate school places were offered to children and young people who were currently without a school place.

Referring to issues of mobility and migration, Councillor Arnold requested clarification about the number of children moving into and out of the borough and details regarding their ages, where they lived and where they had moved to. Clarification was also sought regarding the type of projects underway to resolve school place problems. It was stressed that people needed to be well informed about their rights to school places. In response to concerns expressed about the use of portakabins as teaching sites, Ms Pau acknowledged that more suitable longer term solutions would have to be identified.

Referring to the member-led Strategy Group, Councillor Arnold sought clarification about the composition of the group, the remit and objectives of the group and details about what action had been undertaken by the group to look into the issue of sufficiency of school places in Brent.

In response to a query concerning the 119 Year 6 and Year 7 children that were currently unplaced, Ms Coffey explained that some places had been declined whilst some other children had not been offered places. Whilst there did not appear to be sufficient places for all 119 children, it was anticipated that by September all children requiring a place would indeed have one, again as a result of on-going migration and applications which were not pursued. It was acknowledged that there was often an increase in applications for places at this time of year and that the short term implications could be met. However, it was noted that it was difficult to anticipate how many children would arrive in the borough unexpectedly in the future and therefore with increasing numbers, as supported by GLA projections, there was likely to be an on-going shortage in school places and the longer term implications remained a serious consideration.

In response to a query concerning the catchment criteria, Members were advised that legislation dictated under what circumstances the oversubscription criteria could apply. Following a further query concerning the expansion of schools and the creation of additional school places within Brent's schools, Members were advised that all schools within Brent had been invited to expand their provision but to date only a small number of schools had responded. Consequently, there would be on-going discussions with local schools.

The Chair thanked Ms Coffey for her report.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that members be informed about the composition of and work undertaken by the member-led Strategy Group;
- (ii) that information regarding the member-led Strategy Group be circulated to members of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for information; and
- (iii) that a further update report be presented to the Committee in October clarifying the movement of those children in and out of the borough, with statistical information regarding their age and educational needs and an analysis of what action had been taken by the Council in the event that school places had not been identified.

9. Committee Work Programme 2007/08

The Chair stressed the need to ensure that all papers were circulated on time and considered ahead of meetings in order to generate debate and outcomes. Members noted that a number of substantial reports would be considered at the October Committee meeting including items on youth offending and sexual health. Due to the relevance of these items to the work being undertaken by the Brent Youth Parliament, it was proposed that representatives be invited to attend the meeting as observers and provided with the relevant papers.

Following a request that an update on the creation of additional secondary school places be added to the work programme, Members were advised that the Commission for Racial Equality was currently investigating a complaint concerning an alleged breach by the Council of the Race Equality Duty and that

the outcome of any follow-up investigations may have some impact on the creation of a third city academy. The Chair requested clarification about the plans for a third city academy in the context of other initiatives/ developments.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that an item on a review of the plans to create additional secondary schools within the borough be added to the Committee's 2007/08 work programme, taking into account the current CRE investigations;
- (ii) that an update on the PCT physiotherapy provision cuts be included on the agenda for the October Committee meeting; and
- (iii) that a tracking report on items previously considered by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee be presented to the next meeting; and
- (iv) that the Committee's work programme be updated to reflect the outcomes of discussion at Committee, particularly where there were recommendations or suggested actions.

10. Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED:-

that the next meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee take place on Wednesday, 10th October 2007.

11. Any Other Urgent Business

There was none.

The meeting ended at 10.15 pm

W MOTLEY
Chair