

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
Wednesday, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2007 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Motley (Chair), Councillor Arnold (Vice-Chair) and Councillor Ahmed and co-opted members Rev Phil Stone and Dr Levison (part)

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families), Ms Jenny Cooper (observer), Mrs Lesley Gouldbourne (observer) and Dr Gill Reed (observer) also attended the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Eniola, Mrs Fernandes, C J Patel and Tullett and co-opted members Mrs Bondzi-Simpson and Mr Lorenzato and Mr Vaughan (observer).

**1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

There were none.

**2. Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel held on Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2007 be agreed as a true and accurate record subject to the inclusion of apologies for absence for Councillor Mrs Fernandes.

**3. Matters Arising**

*Teenage Pregnancy and Sexual Health*

The Chair referred to statements that the Teenage Pregnancy and Sexual Health Team would be carrying out an audit of Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) in schools, and asked for an update on progress. John Christie (Director of Children and Families) explained that the audit was in progress and due to be complete by the end of term. The Chair commented that the information would be useful for the Task Group.

*Brent PCT Proposals for making savings at Hay Lane School*

Jenny Cooper (observer) informed the Committee that the Primary Care Trust (PCT) had responded to Hay Lane School's letter offering a compromise to share funding of an additional occupational therapy (OT) post. It was noted that in their response the PCT rejected this proposal. The Chair expressed his disappointment with this response.

## *Community Access to School Facilities*

Lesley Gouldbourne (observer) asked about the guidance on Health and Safety in Extended Schools. Mrs Gouldbourne expressed the view that teachers still sought clarity on issues relating to school's obligations and liabilities. In response Clive Romain (Senior Education Lawyer) explained that liability could be determined by asking whether the child was taking part in an activity relating to the school or whether it was relating to the letting agent. It was noted that this was a grey area however each situation would need to be determined individually. Dr Gill Reed (observer) advised that another area of ambiguity related to the issue of asbestos in school and noted the importance of informing letting agents about a school's asbestos management plan. The Chair commented that any letting agreement should cover this, Clive Romain also noted that the advice from the legal department was that letting agents should have appropriate insurance cover.

### *Information Updates: Improving Outcomes for African Caribbean and Black African Pupils - Task Group Report to Executive*

Councillor Arnold updated the Committee that the Task Group had met with the Brent Youth Matters 2 Forum and it was noted that the Forum was interested in working with the Task Group in the future.

The Committee were also informed that the Task Group report had been put before the Teachers' Panel. A further recommendation arising from this had been that the "Born to Be Great" booklet prepared by the National Union of Teachers should be used as a base for equalities training in schools.

Councillor Arnold asked for an update on developing a knowledge base with regard to good practice and how this was being disseminated across the Council. In response John Christie explained that a knowledge base was developing and referred to the website that had been set up. It was also noted that the Committee would be revisiting the work of the Task Group at their meeting on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April.

In response to a further question from Councillor Arnold about the funding formula, John Christie explained that the Committee would be considering a report on the school funding formula in February.

John Christie also informed the panel of some preliminary figures for GCSE results that indicated an improvement in the number of black African and Caribbean young people achieving A-C grades at GCSE.

#### **4. Youth Service Mapping**

Before the Committee was a paper providing an update on youth services in the borough and outlining the gaps in youth provision. Elizabeth Rand-Greaves (Head of Youth Service) presented the report and highlighted the key issues for members. It was noted that the Youth Service had prepared a directory with details of facilities and services available to

young people in the borough. A copy of the directory "What's the 411" was distributed amongst Panel members, the Head of Youth Service drew Members' attention to the fact that the information was arranged according to locality maps. Members of the Committee expressed the view that the directory was a good quality publication. In response to questions about its availability, Ms Rand-Greaves informed the Committee that the directory was being distributed amongst schools and libraries. She further explained that there would be an interactive website and that the service hoped to produce a smaller version of the directory that would be easier for young people to carry around. The Head of Youth Service also acknowledged the Chair's suggestion that an article summarising what was in the directory, could be placed in The Brent Magazine to further advertise the available facilities.

Noting that there were several football clubs listed in the directory, Jenny Cooper (Observer) suggested that all the football clubs included in the publication should be Football Association (FA) affiliated. Ms Cooper suggested that this would give the assurance that the clubs listed were of a certain standard. In response to questions about monitoring services, Ms Rand-Greaves explained that the Service would need to develop a template to help do this effectively.

There were questions about the effect on Youth Service of the relocation of Kingsbury Library. The Director of Children and Families informed the Committee that all services currently being provided would continue as there were no plans to reduce the facilities.

In response to further questions, Elizabeth Rand-Greaves informed the Committee that one of the Service's objectives was to support young people with mental health issues. The Vice Chair also asked about the Youth Service's methods for targeting young people at risk. The Head of Youth Services explained that this was achieved through Positive Activities for young people (PAYP). It was noted that the PAYP programme made use of referrals from the social care and housing departments, the police and the Primary Care Trust (PCT) to identify those in need. It was also noted that crime mapping was another mechanism that facilitated targeting and Ms Rand-Greaves explained that outreach work could be carried out in identified areas. The Head of Youth Services discussed the link with Integrated Services and informed the Committee that in April the Youth Service would be looking at how to provide targeted support in an integrated way.

Ms Rand-Greaves also highlighted for members the areas in Brent where there gaps in youth service provision. These areas included Queensbury, Sudbury, Kenton, Mapesbury, Tokyngton and Kensal Green wards.

There followed discussion of financial issues affecting the Youth Service. Ms Rand-Greaves informed the Committee that the growth budget had allowed for new staff to be employed including outreach workers, part time youth workers and monitoring officers.

It was highlighted that the Youth Opportunity Fund would be extended until at least 2011 a percentage of which would be devolved to young people for spending. The expectation was that by 2018 up 25% of the fund would be devolved to young people to decide what it be spent on.

It was asked whether local businesses sponsored any youth services. Elizabeth Rand-Greaves responded by explaining that this type of sponsorship has been very minimal in the past. Dr Levison (Co-opted member) expressed the view that it could be worthwhile to explore this potential resource. The Head of Youth Services further discussed funding sources and explained that the service received funding from Summer Activity UK for Brent's Summer University programme. Councillor Arnold asked about the links between the Youth Service and other Children and Families Services and how this affected the distribution of resources. Ms Rand-Greaves explained that there was joint working and gave the example of the Looked After Children (LAC) project that was funded by the social care Department. It was also noted that the Youth Service was involved with Ward working and the John Kelly Bus Project was noted as another example of a project achieved through partnership working. In response to further questions about funding, Ms Rand-Greaves informed the Committee that the Youth Service obtained £1.5 million of funding through external partners.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That the progress on mapping of youth services in the borough be noted; and
- (ii) that the Youth Service be congratulated for their effort in producing "What's the 411" a directory of Youth services in the borough.

## 5. Languages in School

Naureen Kausar (Head of Ethnic Minority & Travellers Achievement Service) presented this item about the different languages spoken in Brent schools and the relationship between first language, ethnicity and achievement in schools.

The Head of EMTAS (Ethnic Minority & Traveller Achievement Service) presented some statistics to demonstrate the wide range of languages spoken in Brent schools. It was noted that 16% of Brent pupils were from the Asian Indian ethnic group, Ms Kausar also explained that the majority of young people in this group were Gujarati speaking.

Members were informed that shifting population patterns often resulted in changes to the languages being spoken in schools. For example it was noted that in recent years there had been a significant rise in the Somali population and consequently a rise in the number of Somali speakers. Additionally, amongst refugees there had been an increase to the number of people from Afghanistan and Iraq, resulting from this there had been a rise in the number of Pashtou and Arabic speaking children in Brent schools. With regard to refugees and asylum seekers it was asked

whether there was support available to those who had suffered a trauma or needed emotional support. Ms Kausar explained that the service employed a Refugee Education Officer who could carry out assessments and make referrals to ensure that the child receives the appropriate support. It was also noted that the service produced an information leaflet for this group and this had been distributed to schools. Additionally the Refugee Education Officer had set up a surgery in some schools so that parents and pupils could access a more immediate point of contact.

Another notable population increase had been in the number of Portuguese speakers in school. Ms Kausar also noted that the increasing size of the Eastern European population in Brent had prompted a shift in the number of pupils speaking eastern European languages such as Polish.

The Head of EMTAS informed the Committee that this year the service had started to use electronic rather than manual data collection methods and it was hoped that this would result in a higher quality of the information being produced.

Members' attention was drawn to the number of programmes that EMTAS were involved to support achievement. These included the English as an Additional Language Programme and the Black Child Achievement Programme that targeted 5 primary schools in the borough.

Naureen Kausar also discussed funding and she informed members about the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant. The Head of EMTAS noted that the grant was ringfenced and she expressed the view that this indicated a commitment to supporting underachieving minority ethnic groups.

It was asked whether the service was doing anything to encourage young people who spoke English as a second language, to take a qualification in their first language. Councillor Arnold suggested that this would help young people to gain confidence and to capitalise on a skill they already had. Ms Kausar acknowledged this and informed the Committee that many schools were moving towards doing this. She explained that this was easier to achieve with languages that had been around for a sustained period however the focus needed to be on newly emerging languages such as Somali.

Councillor Ahmed asked about the monitoring processes. In response Ms Kausar explained that as the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) funded activity in this area, the EMAG link Advisor carried out monitoring through their link visits.

The Chair asked about how parents could become more involved. Naureen Kausar explained that schools often worked towards involving parent and she expressed the view that primary schools were particularly good at this. For example it was noted that some schools ran family literacy programmes on the school site. Other methods included having curriculum meetings with interpreters present. Ms Kausar suggested that

sometimes it was beneficial to have the use of an interpreter for the first meeting as this would help to remove any barriers.

Harbi Farah (Director, Help Somalia Foundation) commented on his experience of working with Somali parents. He informed the Committee of a forum meeting that had been arranged for parents to discuss issues affecting them. Mr Farah explained that many parents were not even aware of the under-achievement of their children. He advised the Committee of some solutions to help support this community. These included establishing after school clubs and helping parents to understand the education system possibly through Extended schools. He expressed the view that the financial support was not there and suggested that there was too great a reliance on community organisations to provide the required support. John Christie acknowledged these points and suggested that with regard to funding, it would be useful in the review of the funding formula to issue guidelines to schools recommending consideration of allocating resources to parenting programmes. Referring to the parents' suggestions, Mr Farah emphasised the need to change the approach to spending to one that looks at what parents need rather than addressing it from a Departmental level. The Chair acknowledged this and suggested that EMAG money could be used to help with supporting parents, however it was noted that this would have to be achieved by working with the schools as most EMAG funds were devolved to the schools. The Chair requested that there be a verbal report to the Committee at their next meeting with a response to these issues.

The Vice Chair also commented on the need for more Somali teachers and enquired whether there was a way to fast-track teachers who were qualified in their country of origin. In response, Ms Kausar explained that this idea was currently being discussed at a national level.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) To note the report and thank the Ethnic Minority & Traveller Achievement Service for their work in supporting this group of young people; and
- (ii) that there be a verbal update to the Committee at the next meeting responding to the issues raised by Somali parents with regard to supporting their children's achievement and how this could be reflected in the funding review.

## **6. Tracking Outcomes from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The report before members outlined how outcomes from the Committee were being monitored and followed up. Stella Akintan (Policy and Performance Officer) presented the report and informed Members that the Work Programme would now be put before the Committee on a more regular basis. Stella Akintan also advised that an action list would be produced following each meeting in order to get a response from the Children and Families Department on the issues raised.

Stella Akintan also discussed the effect of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act which would give overview and scrutiny committees a strengthened role in shaping policy. For example an outcome was that a Scrutiny Committee could request a response from the Executive on an issue. The Policy and Performance Officer suggested that this could have an impact on how Task Group reports were responded to.

With regard to the work programme the Chair updated the Committee on the Task Group on Healthy Relationships, he explained that despite plans to convene it sooner, the first meeting of the Task Group would now be taking place in January.

Lesley Gouldbourne (observer) referred to Appendix B "Actions from 10<sup>th</sup> October meeting" and asked whether member would be receiving the papers being considered by the School Places Strategy. Stella Akintan explained that the Terms of Reference had already been distributed. Acknowledging this, the Chair asked for the rest of papers to be circulated before the next meeting.

Councillor Arnold enquired into the processes around inviting witnesses to meetings and the Chair informed the Committee that this was possible however all invitations would need to be made through the Chair.

**RESOLVED:**

That the method of tracking and monitoring actions and Committee recommendations arising from meetings of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

## **7. Children and Families Complaints – Annual Report 2006/07**

Gillian Burrows (Children and Families Complaints Manager) presented this item on the complaints procedure, the number and type of complaints made to Children & Families during the year and the ways in which these were dealt with.

Before members was the annual report for 2006/07 on complaints and the Complaints manager explained that this was the first annual report to be produced since the Department was established in May 2005. It was noted that the format of the report had been set to meet both corporate requirements and requirements arising from the Children Act. It was emphasised that a priority had been to ensure that complaints were accurately recorded and to achieve this, a new reporting system had been implemented.

With regard to areas for improvement, the Complaints Manager highlighted the need to meet timescales. Ms Burrows advised the Committee of new measures to create a more stable workforce which in turn would improve continuity therefore making it more likely that timescales would be kept to. Lesley Gouldbourne (observer) asked for more information about why time targets were not being met. Ms Burrows

explained that it this was not only due to staffing levels but also due to staff having to balance their priorities. Additionally it was noted that social care complaints were often complex in nature and therefore took longer to resolve. The Complaints Manager explained that there was a statutory timescale of 10 days within which a complaint would have to be dealt with in the first instance and Ms Burrows expressed the view that many Local Authorities found this to be challenging. However she explained that in Brent all complaints are acknowledged on receipt and the Department often recommended that the complainant have the opportunity to meet with an assigned officer to clarify the detail of the complaint. However, Ms Burrows also explained that there were sometimes difficulties with arranging this meeting within the designated timescales.

Dr Levison (Co-opted member) asked whether most complaints were genuine and if not whether the Department operated a filter mechanism to ensure that genuine complaints were being dealt with as a priority. The Complaints Manager explained that the Department aspired to promote a person's right to complain and for this reason did not operate a filter mechanism. She informed the Committee that all complaints were taken seriously and each was assessed individually. However it was noted that there was provision to filter complainants that were considered to be vexatious or unreasonably persistent.

There was discussion about cross departmental complaints relating to the provision of adaptations for disabled children and issues around the Disabled Children Team and Occupational Therapy Team's joint assessment process. Gillian Burrows explained that this was a complicated issue as there was a lot of working across departments; additionally it was necessary to observe different pieces of legislation thus making it a challenge for the process to run smoothly. The Complaints Manager suggested that improved joint working would help to prevent failings in this area.

Jenny Cooper (observer) also asked about the effects of the PCT cuts on Occupational Therapy, the Complaints Manager explained that Occupational Therapy was based in the Housing and Community Care Directorate, and expressed the view that there had been no evidence to suggest that Occupational Therapy had been affected by the cuts.

It was asked whether the Department had received a lot of complaints relating to school admissions. It was noted that there was an appeals process for those who were not happy with their offer of a school place. However, Gillian Burrows explained that there a few complaints from parents who did not get their first choice and had raised issues about the co-ordinated admissions process.

The Chair asked whether there were any statistics to show a comparison with like boroughs on the escalation through the three stages of the complaints process. Gillian Burrows explained that there were figures showing the average rate across London and it was noted that the London average for the percentage of complaints going from Stage 1 to Stage 2 was 90% whereas in Brent 14.7% of complaints progressed to Stage 2.



However the London average for complaint progressing from Stage 2 to Stage 3 was 18% however in Brent this was 7.6%. The Complaints Manager expressed the view that whilst a higher than average number of complaints were progressing to Stage 2 it was evident that complaints were being dealt with satisfactorily at this stage as there was a lower than average number of complaints reaching Stage 3.

Dr Gill Reed asked how the Department responded should it become apparent that a service was receiving a high number of complaints from a particular service user group. The Complaints Manager informed the Committee that in this instance the information would be fed back to the Departmental Management team in order for them to assess the issues that were causing this.

In response to questions about the type of complaints relating to transportation services, Gillian Burrows explained that they were generally either about the drivers or the actual delivery of the service. For example there had been complaints about accessing transport or changes to routes.

Jenny Cooper asked whether there were many complaints about the services offered to those who were just above school age but in need of continued care from adult services. Gillian Burrows explained that this stage was known as transition and noted that there had been no complaints about this. However it was noted that should a complaint arise it would be dealt with in conjunction with the Housing and Community Care Directorate.

With regard to how widely known the complaints process was, the Complaints Manager explained that a service objective was to ensure that people knew about the procedure and felt empowered to use it. She informed the Committee that there were information posters and leaflets in all offices and One Stop Shops. These were also available in a wide selection of languages. The Complaints Manager noted that the service would be interested to hear about any users who encountered difficulty with accessing information about the complaints process.

It was noted that due to this being the first annual report for the Children and Families Department, it was not possible to make comparisons with previous years. However, the Complaints manager informed the Committee that the service was committed to learning from the complaints received and monitoring outcomes in order to help improve the service in the future. The Chair thanked the Complaints Manager for the thorough report.

RESOLVED:-

That the report be noted.

## 8. Primary and Secondary School Places Update

John Christie (Director of Children and Families) provided this update for the Committee on issues relating to the number of primary and secondary school places. He explained that children were continuing to arrive every week and that schools were relying on pupil turnover in order to provide places for the new arrivals. John Christie informed the Committee that the Department's forecasts had been fulfilled and there were still more new arrivals than expected.

The Director for Children and Families discussed the projects established to help meet the demand. For example it was noted that 4 emergency primary school classes had been opened in September at various schools across the borough. It was further noted that three of those schools would not be able to do the same for the next school year and yet there was already a projected need for 4 more forms of entry to be provided. One plan was for the Academy at Wembley Park to open early to provide two forms of entry (FE). John Christie explained that several schools had indicated a willingness to increase their capacity, however many of these schools also wanted some assurances that they would be able to provide permanent buildings to accommodate this.

John Christie also informed the Committee that the Department was in the process of bidding for emergency funds from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in order to assist with increasing capacity. In response to questions about the figures, John Christie explained that the DCSF agreed with the figures for secondary schools demonstrating a projected need for 16FE, however he expressed the view that there may be an issue as funds were likely to be allocated through the Building Schools for the Future fund, however these may not be allocated soon enough. With regard to the primary school figures, it was noted that the forecasts had not been verified yet. However John Christie explained that during discussions with the DCSF he was able to demonstrate that the Council had been spending its money on existing projects and ensuring that as much as possible had been done to provide school places.

There followed questions about the propose Wembley Park Academy. Lesley Gouldbourne explained that she had observed holes in the ground on the site and asked whether this indicated that the sports ground was going to be built on. John Christie explained that there were still no plans to encroach on the playing field area any further than the original plans stated. He suggested that the holes were likely to have resulted from soil sampling exercises across the site that had to take place. Lesley Gouldbourne also expressed concerns about the Academy's sponsor's intentions with regard to employee working conditions and rights such as maternity leave. In response John Christie explained that he was not aware of any proposals to reduce benefits such as maternity leave. He added that there had been discussions about employee benefits and it had appeared that the sponsors were keen to ensure they worked within the Council's guidelines and maintain similar terms and conditions as other schools in the borough. John Christie informed the Committee that

there would be further discussion about the detail in order to ensure that employee entitlements were not adversely affected.

It was asked how plans for a further 2 FE in the north east of the borough would be funded. John Christie explained to the Committee that these would be part of a school in the new Oriental City development. It was noted that the site and the school building was to be provided by the developer, however the Council would need to determine how to fund equipping the school.

Dr Gill Reed (observer) suggested that consideration could be given to whether the Local Authority could be the joint sponsor of an academy with a local organisation as a potential partner. It was noted that other Local Authorities had taken this approach and Dr Reed expressed the view that this made the sponsors more accessible.

There was discussion about the impact of the Race Relations Amendment Act on the development of new schools. Dr Reed expressed the view that the report had failed to note the implications arising from this act under the Legal Implications section of the report before members. Dr Reed also suggested that the local Authority had a duty to perform a race equality assessment and advised that the Department should liaise with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in order to do so. Dr Reed also expressed the view that evidence arising from this could inform the Council's approach to expanding education provision on the borough and prevent the possibility of any racial discrimination. John Christie explained that his Department had carried out an impact assessment whilst working on proposals for the new Academy. He also informed the Committee that the EHRC had not indicated that there was a further need for an additional race equality assessment. The Chair commented that the issue of demand for school places in the south of the borough and the wider implications of children travelling from the south to the north, were issues worthy of wider debate by the Committee at a future meeting. Accordingly the Chair suggested that this be an item on a future agenda. He expressed the view that there needed to be a flexible but substantial strategy for the expansion of schools and the possibility of new builds.

John Christie further discussed the need for school places in the south of the borough, he explained that it had not been possible to identify a site for a new school in the south. The Director for Children and Families also explained that an analysis had shown that parents were making an active choice for schools in the north of the borough so the demand for schools there was greater there than in the south. However Reverend Stone commented on the increase in the birth rate in the south of the borough and he suggested that this would result in an increased demand for primary school places in the near future. John Christie acknowledged this noting that this was in line with the forecasts and he explained that there were proposals for expansions to Kensal Rise and Stonebridge Primary schools amongst others. However he added that the greatest demand for primary school places was in the Wembley area.

Jenny Cooper referred to the strategy group mentioned under paragraph 3.14 of the report and asked whether consideration would be given to having a trade union representative on the group. In response John Christie explained that the headteacher members were appointed by a headteacher group. He further explained that trade union members had the opportunity to comment on the highlighted issues at meetings of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. However Lesley Gouldbourne commented that this Committee performed a scrutiny function whereas the strategy group would have more influence on policy.

Also referring to paragraph 3.14 of the report, Lesley Gouldbourne informed the Committee that the Teachers' Panel was willing to offer its support to the Director of Children and Families in his preparation to submit a detailed proposal to the DCSF pressing for additional capital resource to increase school capacity.

Councillor Arnold asked whether neighbouring boroughs were in a comparable situation with regard to demand for school places and if so how were they dealing with it. John Christie informed the Committee that there was increasing demand in the region as a whole however he expressed the view that it was most acute in Brent. He suggested that the London boroughs of Lambeth and Wandsworth were also facing similar circumstances.

**RESOLVED:-**

That the increase in pupil numbers at primary and secondary level and the proposed plans for increasing capacity be noted.

**10. Date of Next Meeting**

**RESOLVED:-**

that the next meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee take place on Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> February 2007.

**11. Any Other Urgent Business**

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9.45 pm

W MOTLEY  
Chair