

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Wednesday 26 November 2008 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Motley (Chair), Councillor Mrs Fernandes (Vice Chair), and Councillors Arnold, Eniola, Mistry J Moher, and Tancred, together with co-opted member Mr Lorenzato, Mr Akisanya and Dr Levison, and observers Ms C Jolinon and Mrs L Gouldbourne.

Apologies for absence were received from Ms J Cooper (Teachers' Panel).

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families) and Petergaye Palmer (Brent Youth Parliament).

The Chair welcomed Petergaye Palmer, a representative of Brent Youth Parliament, to the meeting.

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

None.

**2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 September 2008 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

**3. Matters Arising**

*Item 5 – Sports Provision Available to Young People in Brent*

The Chair confirmed that a report recently submitted to the Executive on sports provision would be considered in the context of the Committee's work on the strategy for sports provision for young people across the borough.

**4. Work Programme**

The Chair took members through the work programme, which set out work already completed by the Committee, together with projects for the future.

In addition to work planned for the March 2009 meeting, the Chair reported that there would also be a report on children's safeguarding in the light of a recent high-profile child protection case in Haringey.

Members also agreed to add the following areas to the work programme: further consideration of 14-19 provision, swimming, progress on a major Building Schools for the Future (BSF) application, the differential spread of youth services across the borough, progress on the review of Special Educational Needs (SEN), an update on the improving outcomes project, the impact of the reduction in the school nurse service, and the new arrangements for allocating nursery places.

Responding to a question from a member of the Teachers' Panel, the Chair confirmed that the report on tackling homophobic bullying, proposed for the next meeting, would include information on how schools were marking LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender/transsexual) History Month. Asked about including a report on the issue of asbestos in schools, the Chair agreed to consider this and to establish whether it was within the Committee's remit.

RESOLVED:

that the proposed topics be included in the Committee's work programme.

5. **How Parents and Faith Communities Can Encourage and Sustain Healthy Relationships amongst Young People –Task Group Report**

The Chair introduced the final report of the Healthy Relationships task group, which the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to set up on 10 October 2007, and in response to a recommendation from the Brent Youth Parliament, to consider how to involve parents and faith groups in talking to young people about sex and relationships. The task group had considered evidence from a wide range of witnesses and the Chair drew members' attention to the recommendations set out in the report. The Chair reported that the report would go to the Children and Families Department, then the Executive, with a report on progress to come to this Committee in six months' time.

Asked why various issues in the report had not been mentioned in the conclusions, the Chair informed members that the report had been operating in a wider context, and that many of the detailed issues had been addressed in a task group report three years previously. Answering a question on whether faith groups would be open about the issues raised in the report, the Chair told members that the difficulties were not being underestimated, but it was a case of moving in the right direction.

In answer to members' questions the Chair reported that the main source of contact with faith groups would be the Brent multi-faith forum, which would be invited to work with the Children and Families Department to develop a policy and draw up leaflets. Members noted that it should not be assumed that faith groups were necessarily coherent groups, but commended the initiative as a good start in the right direction.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the report, together with its five recommendations, be approved;
- (ii) that the report, subject to officers' comments, be forwarded to the Executive.

## **6. Update on Primary and Secondary School Places**

Mustafa Salih (Assistant Director, Finance & Performance) introduced the report and answered questions from members on the sufficiency of school places, the number of children currently without a school place, and measures taken to provide suitable provision out of school. He reported that the demand for school places had increased over the past few years and was in line with available projections. According to current projections Brent would need an additional 4.5 forms of entry in the primary sector by 2010/11 and 16 forms of entry in the secondary sector by 2018. An example of the pressure on school places in Brent was the fact that in the previous year an additional 185 reception pupils had had to be found school places. Mustafa Salih reported that local authorities worked to a planning margin of surplus capacity in order to allow for parental choice and sudden increases in pupil numbers. Brent worked to a tight margin of 5%, but was not always able to achieve this. The Council had expanded provision significantly in the past few years, but it had reached the limit of possible expansion using its own resources, so further expansion was now dependent on new funding streams, such as Building Schools for the Future (BSF).

Answering a question about demographic change in Brent, Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families) reported that while there had been no change in the number of people coming into the borough, the profile of the origin of incomers was changing, for example, there were now more Romanians and Bulgarians. He also took the view that the economic crisis might produce some changes, including the possibility of a collapse of demand for private education, which would add to the pressure on school places.

Asked by a representative of the Teachers' Panel whether the Council liaised with teacher recruitment services about the number of school places, Mustafa Salih informed the Committee that he would ensure that this happened.

In answer to a question about the age of the system-built classrooms at the ARK Academy, Councillor Wharton informed members that they were new that year.

Mustafa Salih and Councillor Wharton also answered questions on the Council's BSF £80m bid. An expression of interest was in the process of being submitted and there would be two further stages before the outcome was known. The Committee agreed to receive a report on this, as soon as the outcome was known.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that a report on the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) bid be brought to this Committee when further information became available.

## **7. Special Educational Needs – Overview of Current Provision and Future Plans**

Rik Boxer (Assistant Director, Achievement & Inclusion) presented the report and answered members' questions on an overview of progress and provision for children with special educational needs (SEN) in Brent. He reported that the percentage of pupils with SEN within Brent was larger than the national average. Pupils with school-based support made good progress, but the progress of statemented pupils was not as good, but there was evidence that the complexity of needs of statemented pupils was also higher than average in Brent.

Rik Boxer drew members' attention to information on current specialist provision within mainstream and special schools, indications of future trends and work in progress and being planned. The intention was, wherever possible, to meet the needs of SEN within the borough. If successful, the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) bid would provide a major opportunity to improve SEN provision with the secondary sector.

Rik Boxer concluded by reporting that SEN services would be the subject of a Council improvement and efficiency review in early 2009. The focus of the work would be to look at how local authority SEN services were organised and to ensure that they were working as effectively as possible. Asked about the involvement of Councillors in the review, Councillor Wharton told the Committee that this would happen towards the conclusion of the review.

Asked about the number of pupils at the lower end of the autistic spectrum – none were indicated in the data – Rik Boxer agreed to check this. In answer to another question, he confirmed that a reference to respite care in the report did not mean residential education. Answering a question about the idea of collocating mainstream and special schools, Rik Boxer informed the Committee that there would be major opportunities to consider this if the BSF bid was successful.

In response to a member's question, Rik Boxer agreed to supply a breakdown of SEN data by gender and ethnicity. Answering a question about the use of alternative methods to address SEN, Rik Boxer told the Committee that Brent provided a wide range of provision and that some high-profile alternative methods were controversial, with conflicting evidence of their success. Where there was clear evidence of the success of a new method, Brent embraced it.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that the Committee receive a report at the conclusion of the SEN services improvement and efficiency review;
- (iii) that the Committee include in its work programme at a future date the issue of the quality of SEN provision in schools.

**8. North Kilburn Partnership and the Provision of Facilities for Young People**

Councillor Arnold took members through the report, which set out progress on addressing concerns about the lack of youth facilities and activities in the North Kilburn area. She reported that the lack of youth facilities and activities had been raised in 2005, followed by petitions in 2006. The petitions had been reviewed by this Committee in 2007, and the Committee had supported in principle requests for co-ordinated and accessible youth programmes and community facilities. The partnership had grown into a group of local services providers working in collaboration. A community facility had not yet been achieved, but a bid was under way with a view to converting disused toilets into a suitable resource. There had been various successful activities, and relations between young people and shopkeepers had improved as a result of measures taken. The police had been proactive and had worked well with the young people.

After discussion, members agreed in principle to support the work of the partnership, and the Chair thanked Councillor Arnold for her work on it.

**RESOLVED:**

that the report be noted.

**9. Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting, originally scheduled for Wednesday 21 January 2009, would now be held on Wednesday 4 February. The Chair reported that it was hoped to hold the meeting at a community venue.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm.

W MOTLEY  
Chair