

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 16 June 2009 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Motley (Chair), Councillors Arnold, Eniola, Mistry and Tancred, together with co-opted members Mr Lorenzato and Mr Akisanya, and observers Ms J Cooper, Ms C Jolinon and Mr H Brown (for Mrs L Gouldbourne).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs Fernandes and from co-opted member Dr Levison and observer Mrs L Gouldbourne (Teachers' Panel).

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families), together with Reem Ali and Devina Maru, representatives of Brent Youth Parliament.

The Chair welcomed the representatives of Brent Youth Parliament to the meeting. The Chair reported that Brent Youth Parliament representatives now had the formal status of observers at the meeting.

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interest

None declared.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED:

that, subject to the following amendment, the minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 29 April 2009 be agreed as a true and accurate record:

Item 3 – Matters Arising – Child Protection Arrangements in Brent

The words "Vice Chair" to be replaced by "Councillor Mrs Fernandes".

3. Matters Arising

Item 3 – Matters Arising – Child Protection Arrangements in Brent

The Chair reported back to the Committee on a separate meeting on child protection arrangements in Brent. The Chair and Councillor Arnold had attended the meeting, which had been chaired by Councillor Wharton as the Lead Member. It had been an opportunity for members to inform themselves about arrangements on a confidential basis. The Chair expressed his concern that councillors needed more information in order to carry out their role as corporate parents. At the meeting the Chair and Councillor Arnold heard a review of the child protection arrangements and been informed about the new arrangements for inspection. Having read the Laming Report on Baby Peter, the Chair was conscious of the general difficulty and fundamental problem of recruiting and retaining permanent social work staff.

Councillor Arnold added that she felt the meeting had been a good start. She agreed that councillors had a big responsibility for children in care and children at risk. She reported that it had been useful to hear about the emphasis on workforce development in the context of recruitment and

retention. She looked forward to receiving more structured information about this at future meetings. Work with the Council's partners would be discussed at the next meeting.

The Chair informed the Committee that if any concern arose in the group, it would be brought to the Committee to be scrutinised.

Item 3 – Matters Arising – School Nursing

The Chair reported that NHS Brent had assured him that it would be able to meet its commitment in relation to named school nurses for primary schools and specialist nurses for secondary schools.

Item 7 – Education Standards in Brent

The Chair apologised for not yet having written a letter to thank teachers for their work during the year. He intended to send out the letter by the end of the current week.

4. Issues for Investigation by Service Review on Youth Services

Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director – Policy) presented a report and answered questions from members on the work of the Youth Strategy Group, which had met several times to discuss how best to improve services for young people in Brent. The report also set out issues to be the basis of the forthcoming service review to be carried out by the Youth Service, in conjunction with the Brent Excellence Support Team (BEST). Cathy Tyson reported that the strategy group had focussed on three aspects – that the services provided should be about fun, as well as about achieving qualifications, skills and employment, with a particular focus on communications. It also wanted to respond to young people's feelings about being safe. Time had been spent on mapping services geographically and it was hoped to be able to evaluate services qualitatively. Cathy Tyson informed the Committee that there were a large number of services for young people, but the services were not necessarily organized strategically. The work of voluntary sector groups was also being evaluated with a view to assessing whether the grants regime was supporting services that young people wanted. The strategy group was seeking to improve performance around accredited outcomes and to analyse whether the profile of users was reflected appropriately.

Members welcomed the work of the strategy group as a very good start. Answering questions from members, Cathy Tyson reported that the aim was to ensure quality of service to all young people as service users. A variety of methods had been used for consultation. In addition to consultation using computer technology, officers had gone out into the community to talk to young people and their families. Cathy Tyson recognised that the need for accredited outcomes should not become a barrier for organisations. A balance needed to be struck between fun and accredited outcomes.

Answering a question about the possibility of inter-generation ventures, Krutika Pau (Assistant Director, Strategy and Partnerships) informed the Panel that forums were being planned in five localities. Two inter-generational

children's centres were planned – one at Kingsbury High School, another at St Raphael's Community Centre, and a bid had been put together in relation to inter-generational work. It was already well understood that young people wanted more things to do, and the issue was how the Council used its resources and those of its partners to maximise opportunities.

Cathy Tyson agreed on the need to consult young people with disabilities, and advice was being taken on this.

Answering a question about apparently differing results on the provision of services, Cathy Tyson informed the Committee that each set of data was necessarily a snapshot at a given moment in time, and did not always provide a complete picture. Checks would be made to ensure that the information for each ward was up to date.

Answering a question about locality-based working, Krutika Pau reported that this principle was well-established in relation to delivering the *Every Child Matters* agenda. Some authorities had successfully used seed funding to help emerging groups and communities.

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families) informed the Committee that changes had been made following complaints that the same voluntary and community organisations received Council funding every year. As a result, around £250,000 had been allocated to youth groups. In addition, the funds had been allocated for a period of three years, in order to ensure that groups did not need to spend undue time and effort on re-bidding.

Cathy Tyson added that the Council was actively looking at the issue of seed funding and simplifying arrangements for applying for small amounts of money. She pointed out that a large proportion of neighbourhood working funding had gone to youth groups.

The Committee agreed that the Council was best placed to keep a database of voluntary and community organisations. This would make it easier for the Council to make them aware of opportunities for funding, for example.

Cathy Tyson informed members that the service review would start formally in August, and would take between four and six months to carry out its work. Members requested an information report on the scope of the review be presented at the October 2009 meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that an information report on the scope of the Youth Service review be presented at the October 2009 meeting of the Committee.

5. Transforming Learning in Brent (Building Schools for the Future – BSF)

Mustafa Salih (Assistant Director, Children and Families) presented the report and answered questions from members on the Brent's BSF programme, entitled *Transforming Learning in Brent*. He reported that BSF was an ambitious and far-reaching long-term change programme, offering local authorities a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform educational

provision and significantly improve educational outcomes and life chances of children, young people and families. He circulated to members the following reports:

- a map relating to the whole BSF process
- a copy of Brent's *Readiness to Deliver* document
- information on the project's governance and management structure.

Mustafa Salih briefed members on the timelines relating to Brent's BSF application. The *Readiness to Deliver* document had been submitted on 8 May 2009. This was a competitive process – in the current round there had been 43 successful expressions of interest initially, and around 20 had submitted *Readiness to Deliver* documents. Partnership for Schools (PfS), the relevant government agency with the task of delivering the BSF programme nationally, was due to announce during the current month the names of the authorities selected. It was not known how many would be selected. Mustafa Salih believed that Brent was in a very good position as, if it was not selected in the current round, there would be opportunities every three months afterwards to join. BSF would be a very exciting and significant project for Brent and would mean a total of over £300m investment in schools. The process of applying was lengthy, and it was essential to demonstrate that the new buildings would be used to transform learning and that targets would be agreed. The earliest a new school could be built would be in time for September 2013.

Mustafa Salih outlined the governance structure of the project, pointing out that this was prescribed by the Government. The current priorities for Brent, as listed in the *Readiness to Deliver* document, were Queens Park Community School, Cardinal Hinsley Mathematics and Computing College, and Alperton Community School.

Noting that the first wave of funding would be around £80m, the Chair was concerned at what might happen if there were a change of Government. Mustafa Salih reported that this was not known, but that education was a high priority for all the main political parties.

Answering a question about the effect of new housing developments on school numbers, Mustafa Salih informed the Committee that officers had worked closely with planners, which was one reason why Alperton and Queens Park had become priorities.

A representative of the Teachers' Panel requested that the Project Board and Education Work Group have a teachers' trade union representative. Asked whether either body contained a Headteacher with experience of new buildings, Mustafa Salih reported that, while this was not the case, a key part of the process would be visits to rebuilt schools, and external advisers would be commissioned. At school level there would be a design team with representatives of the staff, as well as of pupils. Councillor Wharton pointed out that the whole PfS process was very prescriptive, and he agreed on the importance of consulting staff once the project was up and running. The Chair agreed that this should be done as soon as practically possible.

The Committee requested that the outcome of the bid be made known to its members as soon as possible after it was known. The Committee also agreed to receive further updates on the project in future and that BSF be considered a standing agenda item for future meetings of the Committee

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that the outcome of Brent's current bid be made known to Committee members as soon as possible;
- (iii) that the Committee receive further updates on the progress of BSF and that the project be considered a standing agenda item for future meetings of the Committee.

6. Delivering Integrated, Early Intervention Services for Children in Localities

Krutika Pau (Assistant Director, Strategy and Partnerships) introduced the report and answered questions from members on plans to provide targeted support in localities to children and young people identified as having additional needs. Krutika Pau reported that a lot of work had been done on strengthening universal services, building in prevention and appropriate intervention. Co-located teams aimed at providing well co-ordinated services, built around the child, were planned in each of Brent's five localities – Kilburn, Kingsbury, Willesden, Wembley and Harlesden. It was already known where three of the teams would be based – at Kingsbury High School, alongside a phase 3 children's centre, at Preston Manor High School and at Challenge House in Harlesden, as part of a phase 3 children's centre. Krutika Pau informed the Committee that the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) was part of the process of helping parents and carers, with schools at the heart of the model. No additional resources had been made available for locality working. Current resources and activity were being looked at with a view to resourcing the service. NHS Brent had indicated its interest in this model, but was currently focussing on recruiting school nurses and health visitors and improving the quality of provision.

Responding to concerns that the CAF process could be seen as too focussed on process, becoming a barrier, Krutika Pau informed the Committee that this had been piloted. She acknowledged that the form was cumbersome, but pointed out that it was prescribed nationally. In order to prevent this problem, Brent had designed a pre-CAF form which was no longer than one side of A4 paper. Answering questions from members, she reported that 300 colleagues in Brent had been trained on CAF, and that teachers, especially SEN Co-ordinators, had been offered this. A total of 130 children had been assessed, the interventions varying, with needs sometimes met through existing services. There had not been as many referrals as expected from health visitors, however. Asked how the process would be assessed, Krutika Pau reported that the second round of evaluation would be on the impact of interventions. Members of the Committee expressed an interest in seeing this

evaluation. The Committee was also interested in information about the next stage of development, with information on the number of professionals involved and their contribution.

Asked how the locality-based services would be delivered in relation to pre-school children, Krutika Pau reported that most of the experience up to now had been in schools, but work had also been done in children's centres. This included outreach work, with staff from children's centres acting on birth data from the NHS and making home visits.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the report and the Committee's encouragement of locality-based working, be noted;
- (ii) that the Committee receive information on the evaluation of locality-based intervention and details of the next stage of development;
- (iii) that the Committee hold a future meeting, within 18 months to two years, at a locality centre.

7. Update on Primary and Secondary School Places

Krutika Pau (Assistant Director, Strategy and Partnerships) provided a verbal update 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. She reported that 42 primary school age children were out of school – over 80% of these had approached the authority for a school place within the previous six weeks. A total of 76 secondary age pupils were without a place, with over 70% having applied for a place within the previous six weeks, and 50 having attended for assessment and expected to be placed within the next 10 days. Currently 138 pupils due to transfer to high school in September were unplaced, although there were 194 vacancies in the system.

A total of 199 pupils due to start primary school in September were as yet unplaced, and only 58 vacancies were available. In order to address the shortfall, the authority was in the process of securing agreement from two schools to provide additional classes in existing school buildings, thereby making 60 new places available.

The challenge was to ensure that all pupils had a place for September. Answering questions from members, Krutika Pau informed the Committee that there was movement within London and the UK, as well as people new to the country, and the likelihood was that more children and young people needing school places before September. Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families) added that there would inevitably be cases of families moving away during the summer without notifying the authority, and it would be some weeks into September before the final figures were known.

Members agreed that they had found it useful in the past to see geographical data relating to the distribution of unplaced pupils and school vacancies, and requested that such information be supplied for the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the verbal update be noted;
- (ii) that the Committee receive information on the geographical distribution of unplaced pupils and school vacancies at its next meeting.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held on Thursday 16 July 2009.

The Chair informed members that this would be a 'blue sky thinking'/brainstorming session on the issue of placements for and academic and other outcomes of looked after children, as compared with those in other European countries such as Germany and Denmark. It was hoped to have academic witnesses, and other councillors would also be invited.

It was also agreed to consider the work programme at the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 9.50 pm.

W MOTLEY
Chair