



MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 12 February 2013 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Mashari (Chair), Councillor Cheese (Vice-Chair), Councillors Aden, Al-Ebadi, Matthews, Mitchell Murray, and Krupa Sheth and Mr A Frederick, Ms E Points, Dr Levison, Mrs L Gouldbourne and Brent Youth Parliament representatives

Also present: Councillors Arnold and Butt

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillor Pavey and Ms J Cooper and Ms C Jolinon

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Deputations (if any)

None

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 11 December 2012

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 11 December 2012 be approved as a correct record.

4. Brent Youth Parliament update

Thivya Jeyashanker (Chair of Brent Youth Parliament (BYP)) provided an update to the committee on the work of the BYP.

BYP Elections

Elections had just been held in December and a new Executive had been elected. Thivya Jeyashanker had been re-elected Chair of BYP whilst Chante had been re-elected as the Brent member of the UK Youth Parliament (MYP). New portfolio holders would be contacting the relevant lead members.

Curriculum for Life

Chante Joseph was currently leading on BYP's efforts towards the UK Youth Council's National campaign, 'Curriculum for Life'. This campaign sought a youth-led review and subsequent overhaul of the national curriculum to better equip young people for life by providing them with improved sex and relationship education and helping them to develop greater political knowledge, cultural awareness, community cohesion, finance skills and sustainable living.

16-18 Bursaries

This campaign sought to inform young people of the financial support available to them. The deputy Brent MYP was leading on this campaign.

Working with London Boroughs

BYP was exploring opportunities to work with other London Boroughs to identify common objectives that could be achieved more effectively via joint working.

BYP Main Campaign

'Have your say' forms were being sent out to schools and youth groups across the borough to identify a key issue which would form the basis of BYP's annual campaign. The BYP was also seeking to identify a local charity to support in achieving its aims.

Roundwood Community Centre Update

The youth club was now open and members were welcomed to visit. A half term programme had been developed. In response to a query, Thivya Jeyashanker advised that there was IT equipment accessible at the venue. Members were also advised that there was a music studio provided at the youth centre.

Youth Strategic Plan

Work was currently underway on the Brent Youth Strategic Plan.

5. Bullying in Schools

The committee received presentations from the Chair and Vice Chair of the Brent Anti-Bullying Council (ABC), representatives of Mosaic LGBT Youth Centre and from Stephen McMullan (Interim Strategic Lead for Behaviour).

The Chair and Vice Chair of ABC advised that ABC was principally formed of student members nominated by each of the 6 constituent schools and aimed to share best practice. They outlined the achievements of ABC and highlighted planned actions for the current year. The objective of ABC for this year was to spread awareness of the impact of bullying on education. It was emphasised that ABC supported a restorative approach to dealing with incidents between pupils. This approach focussed on helping the various parties understand each other's perspectives and avoided labelling of victims and perpetrators.

The representatives from Mosaic LGBT Youth Centre explained that the centre provided support to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual young people. The centre also offered a range of services aimed at addressing homophobic bullying. These services included conducting surveys of pupil views, assisting with campaigns in schools and the provision of workshops, conferences and staff training to schools and other related parties. Several key obstacles to the momentum of such work were highlighted. Of particular concern was staff turnover, where there had been one key member of staff leading on such work within the school. It was also considered that existing sex education did not sufficiently explore issues of homosexuality and gender identity and where these issues were addressed, it was only for older pupils. It was noted that anti-faith and racist bullying was dealt with very well in the borough and that it was important that homophobic bullying was considered an issue of similar significance.

Stephen McMullan concluded the presentation by noting that almost half (46%) of children and young people have said that they had been bullied at school at some point in their lives, and detailed several examples of good practice from Brent's Schools. A new Ofsted inspection framework had been established and this placed greater emphasis around behaviour and safety. It was now necessary for schools to have mechanisms in place to deal with bullying to achieve an outstanding rating. To receive an inadequate rating for this area bullying would be frequent and/or the pupils would have little confidence in the school's ability to deal with incidents of bullying. Thirteen schools had been inspected in 2012/13 under the new Ofsted Inspection framework, none of which had received an unsatisfactory rating.

The committee congratulated the young representatives of ABC and Mosaic LGBT centre on their presentations and commended the work undertaken by their respective bodies. With reference to the updated ABC leaflet which had been circulated to the committee, Councillor Cheese noted the importance of ensuring that the intended messages were clearly imparted to the target audience. The committee sought further details about the support systems in schools and Councillor Arnold (Lead Member for Children and Families) queried whether it was common for schools in Brent to have mentoring support and student counsellors. A further query was raised regarding ABC and whether any additional channels of support were required to realise any improvements. The committee noted that the take up of the free services to schools offered by the Mosaic LGBT centre was low and queried what prevented schools from making use of these resources. It was also queried what support systems were in place to help parents navigate issues of bullying.

The Chair and Vice Chair of ABC advised that in their school there were lots of mentoring tutors, a mentoring department and school counsellors who offered support. The Chair of BYP added that her school had similar arrangements in place. The main issue remained lines of communication and supporting pupils as they transition from primary school to secondary school. With regard to support for ABC, it was confirmed that attendance at the meetings by all of the schools was perhaps the only area that required attention. Steven McMullan explained that information for parents was set out in schools' anti-bullying policies which detail how such issues should be approached.

The representatives of Mosaic LGBT youth centre explained that the underlying issue to the take up of their services was the independence of schools. Many schools were facing significant challenges at the present time and there was no requirement for them to address such issues. Steven McMullan added that there were also an issue of confidence amongst staff in schools about tackling these issues.

RESOLVED:

that the presentation be noted.

6. Update on progressing recommendations of Youth Offending Task Group/Early Years Intervention Task Group

Sara Williams (Assistant Director, Early Help and Education) presented a report to the committee, updating members on the work undertaken with regard to the recommendations of the Youth Offending / Early Years Intervention Task Group. The task group had produced its final report in September 2011 and a detailed commentary had been produced by Children and Families officers at this time on each of the recommendations. The recommendations of the task group were set out at appendix A to the report.

The committee was advised that prevention now assumed centre stage in the working of the Children and Families Department and in the Plan for Children and Young People in Brent which had been adopted at the end of 2012. The importance of prevention would also be reflected in the Borough Plan which was currently being refreshed by the Interim Chief Executive. The most significant development in the creation of a more coherent approach to prevention was the Working with Families Programme, on which the committee had received a report in December 2012. There were a series of detailed project plans for the programme, including timelines and performance indicators, which effectively constituted a comprehensive preventative strategy. This Working with Families strategy incorporated the development of a 'team around the family' approach underpinned by the coordinating role of Family Support Workers. There would be improved data sharing through the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and greater involvement of schools in identifying and referring families. The development of a financial model demonstrating the savings and cost-avoidance to be achieved from a preventative approach also formed a key aspect of the Working with Families strategy.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

7. Short breaks provision

Neil Macdonald (Interim Head of Service Children's Commissioning) delivered a presentation to the committee on short breaks provision for Children with Disabilities in Brent. The committee was advised that the new Village short breaks centre was now open and had received its first children for respite care on 8 February 2013. The centre replaced the service previously provided at Clement Close and delivered services for children and young people with a range of needs including those on the autistic spectrum, those with complex or specific health needs, those with a physical disability and/or learning disability and children with sensory impairments. The centre was registered to provide short breaks for up to 8 children, double the capacity of Clement Close. The council was currently exploring how best to use this additional capacity. It was intended that a bed would be made available to provide emergency respite care and consideration was currently being given to selling bed space to neighbouring boroughs. In order to ensure that the service was meeting the needs of the children, a parent and professionals advisory group had been established and would meet quarterly to provide feedback and contribute to service planning and delivery. There would also be statutory monthly monitoring visits conducted.

In the subsequent discussion the committee raised several issues. Clarification was sought regarding the purpose and benefits of short break provision. It was noted

that both parents and children might find separation, even for a short period, distressing and a query was raised on how such issues might be dealt with. Further details were sought regarding the additional bed capacity, the potential income that this might generate and whether any consideration was being given to making the after school and day care facilities available to other boroughs. The committee also queried whether any Brent children were receiving out of borough short break provision.

Neil Macdonald advised that short break services provided respite to parents and a break for the children where they were able to socialise with peers and take part in activities that wouldn't be open to them at home. Short break provision enabled children to have periods of independence from their families in a safe enjoyable environment and at the same time helped to relieve pressure on families. It was a voluntary resource and families could choose whether to make use of it. Day care and after school facilities were also offered at the centre and these might be more appropriate for children or families anxious about overnight separation. The amount of hours allotted to a child was dependent on their assessed need. Most children receive between 2 and 3 nights per month which would often be taken as a weekend session at regular intervals so that families could plan for them.

Turning to the queries regarding the additional capacity, Neil Macdonald explained that this issue was currently being explored. It was likely that there would be at least one bed that could be made available to other authorities. It was not intended to open up the day care or after school club to other authorities as it was not convenient for families to access such services at a considerable distance to their homes. The charge that could be made to other local authorities for one bed was between £400 and £450 per night; however, a relationship could be established with one authority with a charge being made for reserving a bed. It was highlighted that no respite centre would run at full capacity. The committee was further advised that there had been 6 children accessing short break provision out of the borough within the current financial year. Those cases would be reviewed to explore whether it would be appropriate to transfer them to in-borough provision; however the impact on the child would be the primary consideration.

The committee requested that a report regarding actions taken with respect to the additional capacity of the centre be brought to a meeting of the committee in six months' time.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

8. Strategy for Special Educational Needs and Disability

A report was presented to the committee by Sara Williams (Assistant Director, Early Help and Education) on the work currently being undertaken to improve the council's approach to meeting the needs of pupils and students with special educational needs (SEN). The committee was advised that the Executive at its meeting on 11 February 2013 had approved a new Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy for 2013-2016. The strategy formed part of the One Council SEN Phase 1 and 2 projects and linked into the Children and Young People's Plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. It was a high-level document

which set out the challenges and the principles underpinning the council's approach to SEND provision and included an action plan for delivery. There had been a two stage consultation on the strategy with all partners including schools, governing bodies, health services, voluntary agencies and parents. The committee attention was drawn to the three broad principles that had been developed through the consultation process and which underpinned the strategy. These focussed on promoting inclusion and independence, making the best possible use of available resources, and effective partnership working to ensure that the right support was received by families at the right time. The overarching aim of the work around SEN provision was to enhance the quality and quantity of SEN services within the borough and to reduce costs.

Sara Williams explained that the new strategy had been developed amid increasing challenges for the provision of SEND services, which principally related to a rapid increase in demand. These challenges had led to a significant overspend on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and central service expenditure. In meeting these challenges the council had made a number of significant achievements. These included a reduction in the number of Statements of SEN produced and an improvement in the efficiency of the process. This had partially been achieved by robustly applying the thresholds for Statements of SEN. There had also been a reduction in placements out of the borough, and an increase in SEN school places in the borough. In addition to these local challenges, government reforms of the legislative framework for SEND were scheduled to be implemented during the period covered by the new strategy. Suggested flexibility had therefore been built into the strategy to accommodate these changes.

Councillor Arnold (Lead Member for Children and Families) reiterated the significance of the challenges around SEND provision and the achievements that had been made. She noted that the council was now on target to meet the overspend on the Schools' budget.

Several issues were raised in the subsequent discussion. Mrs Gouldbourne congratulated the council on the consultation conducted on the new SEND strategy and commented that the strategy would involve a heightened role for staff. The committee queried why a joined up approach had not been pursued previously. Further details were sought regarding the phase 2 SEN project workstreams, with particular reference to the workstream regarding culture change. Additional information was also sought regarding the changes in relation to the Statements of SEN.

Sara Williams advised that there had been a considerable amount of work conducted to achieve a joined up approach. In the past it had been particularly difficult to navigate the issue of separate funding streams and it was an underlying goal of a number of government initiatives to enable funding to be brought together. With regard to the workstreams which had been agreed as part of the Strategy by the Executive, Sara Williams reiterated some of the successes that had been achieved and outlined some of the areas planned for development. The committee was advised that additional SEN school places had been provided and the council was now on track to have sufficient SEN school places. The council was currently looking at the process of commissioning post 16 SEN places to develop a more coherent offer by working directly with local colleges. It was considered that there was considerable potential to create an attractive offer which would help promote

independence for young people with SEN. The council was also examining how SEN was funded in schools and was developing a financial model to explore the impact of national changes to the funding regime. The reference to cultural change was one common to all One Council projects. The key cultural change implicit in the work around SEN was the focus on inclusion.

In response to the queries regarding the SEN Statement process, Sara Williams explained that Brent had previously had one of the worst performances in the country regarding the production of SEN Statements; it now completed 100 per cent of Statements on time. There were less children being put through the SEN Statement process as the associated thresholds were being more robustly applied. This enabled funding to be appropriately directed to supporting children with less complex needs, rather than being spent on taking them through a process designed to accommodate children with highly complex SEN needs. More cases were being taken to tribunal to appeal the council's choice to not pursue a Statement of SEN for particular children and the council was doing well in winning these tribunals and demonstrating that the thresholds had been applied in a fair and transparent manner.

Priya Mistry (Policy and Performance Officer) explained that a copy of the approved SEND Strategy for 2013-16 would be circulated to the committee in advance of its next meeting. It was agreed that some time would be allotted at the next meeting to consider the strategy document.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

9. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

Councillor Mashari listed the items scheduled for the next meeting and the committee agreed the following two additions to the existing work programme:

- Achievement in Schools by ethnicity
- SEN Strategy.

10. Date of next meeting

The committee noted that the next meeting would be held on 20 March 2013.

11. Any other urgent business

School Places Update

Sara Williams (Assistant Director Early Help and Education) explained that as of 8 February 2013 there were 13 pupils without an offer. These 13 children had not yet been placed as they were very recent applications. The rate at which applications continued to be made remained very high. There had recently been 53 casual applications for school places within one week. In response to a query, Sara Williams advised that the applications were mostly for primary school places but there was also significant pressure on year 10 places.

The meeting closed at 9.22 pm

CLLR MASHARI
Chair