



MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 10 October 2013 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Aden, Al-Ebadi, Arnold, Gladbaum, Kansagra, CJ Patel, Mr A Frederick, Ms E Points, Dr Levison, Sullivan, Ms J Cooper and Brent Youth Parliament representatives

Also in attendance: Councillor Pavey*

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillor Mitchell Murray*, Matthews, Mrs L Gouldbourne and Ms C Jolinon

*as amended by the committee on 10 December 2013

1. Election of Chair for the meeting

In the absence of the Chair or Vice Chair of the committee, nominations were sought for a Chair for the duration of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Gladbaum be elected Chair for the duration of the meeting.

2. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

Alloysius Frederick advised that he was now employed by Capita and left the meeting for the duration of the item on Careers Advice for Young People in Brent.

3. Deputations (if any)

None.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting be approved as a correct record.

5. Matters arising

With regard to the presentation on the dental health, the committee sought an update on the two public health posts relating to schools and early years respectively. Councillor Pavey (Lead Member for Children and Families) advised that he would provide an update to the Committee on this matter at the next meeting. He further explained that he was adamant that consideration of children and young people be more deeply embedded in the work programme of the Health

and Wellbeing Board (HWB) and would be providing feedback on this issue and the HWB agenda at future meetings of the committee. Mark Cairns (Policy and Performance Officer) drew members' attention to the letter drafted on behalf of the committee regarding opportunities for dental health outreach work. The committee expressed its thanks to Imran Choudhury for drafting the letter and agreed that it be sent in the name of the whole committee.

The committee noted that as requested, a section setting out the child poverty implications of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) Annual Report had been circulated. In response to members' comments regarding the brevity of section, Sara Williams (Director of Children and Families) advised it addressed the child poverty implications of the LSCB annual report as required and noted that all of the council's strategies were interlinked. The committee requested an expanded version be prepared and circulated.

Responding to members queries, Sara Williams explained that a report on the Early Years team would be submitted to the next meeting of the committee scheduled for 10 December 2013 and that in future, a substantive report would be provided on admissions and school places for the September/October meeting of the committee.

RESOLVED:

- i. that Imran Choudhury be thanked for his work in drafting the letter to NHS England.
- ii. that the letter to NHS England regarding opportunities for dental health outreach work be sent from the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- iii. that a report on the Early Years Service be submitted to the next meeting of the committee on 10 December 2013.
- iv. that a substantive report on admissions and school places be submitted to the September or October meeting of the committee each year.

6. Corporate Parenting Strategy

Vernon Bamforth (Interim Head of Care Planning) and Maggie Taylor (Head of the Virtual School) introduced the report before the committee and gave a detailed presentation on the progress achieved in improving outcomes for Looked After Children (LAC). The presentation provided a profile of Brent's LAC and addressed a broad range of areas including outcomes relating to safeguarding, health, educational attainment and participation. Members were advised that the number of LAC in Brent had been reduced, suggesting successful targeting of preventative services, and the gap between outcomes achieved by LAC and those of their peers had been positively narrowed. It was noted that Looked After Children living in residential children's homes were more likely to achieve poorer outcomes. Successful efforts had been made to place children with complex needs into highly supported foster placements in preference to residential units, resulting in a reduction of the latter from 90 in September 2012 to 75 in September 2013. Similarly, the council had also reduced its reliance on costly Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements, by increasing the proportion of LAC placed with Brent in-house foster carers.

Vernon Bamforth elucidated issues of safeguarding for LAC, including the risks relating to child sexual exploitation, gangs and children missing from education or care. A summary of the council's protocols for identifying and addressing these risks was provided and the committee heard that Brent's Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) was currently reviewing the council's policies and risk assessment tools regarding children missing from care. A multi-agency child sexual exploitation sub-group of Brent's Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) had been established which was addressing this risk within the LAC population. Outlining developments in other areas, Vernon Bamforth explained that there had been an audit of health assessments which had evidenced substantial improvement in the quality of health provision to LAC. The importance of participation was also emphasised and members were apprised of the activities of the Brent Care in Action (CiA) group which encouraged young people to take an active part in shaping the services they used.

Maggie Taylor explained the role of the Brent Virtual School, noting that it was comprised of officers responsible for delivering a co-ordinated system of support to Brent's Looked After Children to achieve improved educational attainment. In fulfilling this role, the Virtual School monitored progression, attendance, exclusion and out of school learning for all Brent LAC and ran a variety of out of school activities. At the present time, the school supported 235 children of which 60 per cent resided outside of Brent. Outlining the headline statistics for the 2012/13 academic year, Maggie Taylor advised that the level of authorised absence was high due in part to requirements to attend appointments relating to their status as LAC. However, efforts were being made to bring this figure down and a new protocol had been introduced requiring authorised absences to be agreed by a manager and the Head of the Virtual School. It was noted that each year the make up of the LAC cohort could vary considerably and this accounted for the fluctuations in attainment. The Virtual School also performed a post 16 role, currently supporting and monitoring 65 care leavers in post 16 education and a further 34 at university. Vernon Bamforth added that care leavers were also supported by the Virtual School through Brent's LAC apprenticeship programme and other projects and providers.

In concluding the presentation, Vernon Bamforth advised that the Corporate Parenting Strategy would increasingly focus on planning for those children who were 'on the edge of care' and those young people moving into adulthood and independence. The council's 'edge of care' arrangements included the creation of Family Assessment and Intervention Resource (FAIR) team which would be utilised when care proceedings were under serious consideration. It was intended that the FAIR team would assist the council in responding to anticipated requirement for care proceedings to be completed within 26 weeks through early intervention and assessment. There would also be a heightened focus on those care leavers who were not in education, employment or training (NEETS) with tighter tracking via the Economic Well-being Strategy Group and Virtual School post 16 teacher.

The committee thanked the officers for their comprehensive presentation and in the subsequent discussion raised several queries. Members sought further detail on the tracking of LAC who were the victims of crime/sexual exploitation. Clarification was requested regarding the arrangements under which children were placed with friends or family. Noting the reduction of residential placements, a request was made for the financial savings to be quantified. The committee asked for further

information regarding the funding prospects for the Fixed 4 Your Future project and sought assurance that the Brent apprenticeship programme would continue. Members queried whether there was any disadvantage to placement outside of the borough. It was highlighted that the Corporate Parenting Board had been restructured in the previous year and it was queried whether all member vacancies had been filled.

In response, Vernon Bamforth advised that a record was maintained of any child that went missing from care and if a certain threshold was met a strategy meeting was held. Children would be interviewed on return but it was acknowledged that it was often difficult to evidence sexual exploitation; this was an area of development and was being headed by the LSCB sub group. It was explained that placements with family or friends could be a voluntary arrangement under a Residential Order, or could be a formalised placement under a Special Guardianship Order which was more common. At the point of taking children into care social services and the police would have to assess whether the child's extended family could accommodate that child. There were no negative outcomes relating to being placed outside of Brent and the council undertook monitoring to ensure that this position was maintained. With regard to the reduction of placements in residential units it was confirmed that there had been savings made; however, often the services commissioned to support the fostering placements in meeting a child's complex needs were delivered by the same providers or via CAMHS. It was confirmed that there was a commitment to continue to deliver the Brent Apprenticeship programme and that it was under review in order to identify which area would be tasked with taking it forward. It was agreed that an update would be provided to the committee on the outcome of the review of the Brent LAC Apprenticeship programme.

Vernon Bamforth confirmed in response to a member's query, that a detailed breakdown by ethnicity of Brent's Black LAC population could be prepared and circulated to the committee.

Councillor Pavey (Lead Member for Children and Families) in addressing the query regarding the Corporate Parenting Board advised that he chaired the board, which included representation from all of the group leaders. Each of the three political groups represented in Brent were able to nominate an additional councillor, although these positions were currently vacant. The Board was currently under review to ensure that it was robust and provided an effective source of challenge. Councillor Arnold suggested that the political groups should be encouraged to nominate to the vacant positions.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the report and presentation be noted;
- (ii) that the committee be provided with an update on the outcome of the review of the Brent Looked After Children Apprenticeship Scheme.

7. Careers Advice for Young People in Brent

Angela Chiswell (Head of Youth Support Services) presented a report updating the committee on the provision of careers advice for young people in Brent. The report detailed the duties of the council, how these were met and outlined significant legislative changes affecting the delivery of careers advice. It was noted that this report had been requested by the Brent Youth Parliament in response to careers advice being frequently highlighted by their members and young people in Brent as an issue of importance.

Members were advised by Angela Chiswell that the Education Act 2011 placed a duty on schools to secure and fund through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) access to independent, impartial careers guidance for their students in years 9 to 11 from September 2012. This duty was extended to encompass years 8, 12 and 13 with effect from September 2013. Academies and Free schools were subject to the same requirements through their funding arrangements and the Department for Education (DfE) intended to extend an equivalent requirement to Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges through their funding agreements. These arrangements replaced the previous duty for Local Authorities to provide careers information, advice and guidance for young people in schools. However, the majority of Brent's Secondary Schools, including Special Schools and alternative education providers had agreed to commission careers information, advice and guidance through Brent Council's Youth and Connexions Service.

Angela Chiswell explained that Local Authorities were still required to meet a range of related duties, including making available support to those under the age of 19 to enable them to participate in education and training; to track and record young people's post-16 participation; to ensure all 16 and 17 year olds received suitable offers to continue in education or training; and to have arrangements in place to identify those young people who were not participating. The council met its current responsibilities via an in-house team of eight Connexions Advisers who provided intensive support, a Connexions Services contract which was currently out to tender for the period 2014 to 2017, and through the maintenance of the Integrated Youth Support database by Ealing Council on behalf of the West London Boroughs and Pan-London database by Central London Connexions.

It was emphasised that Brent's performance in meeting its duties in this area was good. Angela Chiswell explained that the Youth and Connexions service consistently achieved the key performance target for the number of 16 to 18 year olds in the NEET group, with a performance that was the third best in England measured over the period November 2012 to January 2013. Furthermore, in June 2012, Brent exceeded the national and London averages for the proportion of 16 to 17 year olds in education or training. The committee was advised that the Youth and Connexions Service had responded to the new arrangements by developing service delivery to reflect the changing role for the local authority. It was highlighted that following the closure of the Connexions Centre in Willesden on 31 August 2012, a number of access points had been established across Brent including at the new Roundwood myplace Youth Centre and the Brent Civic Centre. In addition, a wide range of mechanisms for delivering careers advice had been utilised in the past year and these were expounded for the committee's information.

Members of the committee and representatives of Brent Youth Parliament, raised a number of queries in the discussion following. It was queried whether the council monitored the quality of careers advice being provided in schools. Further

information was requested in relation to the advertisement of the careers services available to young people in Brent. Concerns were raised about the emphasis within careers advice provided on academic routes of progression and queries were raised about how this issue was best tackled. The committee sought details on the numbers of schools buying into the council's careers service and it was queried whether there was any discernible correlation regarding the types of school opting to pursue this option.

Responding to the queries raised, John Galligan (School Improvement Lead - Secondary/14-19) advised that there was no correlation between school type and the decision to procure a careers advice service via the council. He further explained that as the statutory responsibility for provision of careers advice had transferred to schools, the council was not monitoring Schools' compliance. The movement of this duty to schools was underpinned by the concept that schools understood their pupils best and would therefore be able to deliver or procure the most appropriate form of provision. There were however, concerns that the new arrangements would lead to a loss of uniform quality assurance. Ofsted had carried out a thematic survey, visiting Brent in the process, and had found that there was a difference in quality of provision across schools. In response to its findings, Ofsted had published a series of recommendations and amended its schools inspection regime to include an assessment of the quality of careers guidance. The regularity of Ofsted inspections depended on how well schools had performed previously. A school awarded an outstanding rating by Ofsted might not be subject to further inspection for several years; however, a school which had been found to require improvement might be inspected as regularly as every term.

John Galligan further explained to the committee that the council did not have the resources to carry out its own inspection of careers advice provision in schools. However, the council supported a Brent 14-19 Partnership which included all schools, training providers and colleges. A key priority set by the partnership was to ensure that all pupils had access to high quality advice and guidance. Furthermore, the College of North West London had proposed to commit resources to re-establish a network, previously supported by the council, to allow Brent Schools to share best practice and discuss issues regarding careers advice provision. With regard to concerns expressed relating to provision being biased towards academic pathways, it was explained that the DfE Statutory Guidance clearly stipulated that schools were required to ensure information was made available on all pathways. However, it was agreed that a meeting with representatives of Brent Youth Parliament would be beneficial in addressing this issue. Angela Chiswell added that the council's careers services were advertised in several ways; in some situations by direct mail to young people and most often through schools, emails and via the B My Voice website. Various successful events were held which enabled young people to be brought into direct contact with a range of different services offering opportunities.

Members commented on the importance of utilising the existing resources of schools including the teachers, governors and parents associations, in the work of the Brent 14-19 Partnership. John Galligan agreed, noting that this was similar to one of the recommendations made by Ofsted.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

8. Working with Families update

RESOLVED:

That due to time limitations, consideration of the Working with Families update report be deferred to the next meeting of the committee, scheduled for 10 December 2013.

9. Brent Youth Parliament update

Roisin Healy (Brent Youth Parliament (BYP) Representative) updated the committee on the recent work undertaken by the BYP. Members were reminded that elections for BYP were scheduled for 18 November 2013 and it was noted that Thyvia Jeyashanker, previously Chair of the BYP, had recently resigned her position following her employment as a youth worker with the council.

Roisin Healy advised the committee that work had been on-going with the United Kingdom Youth Parliament (UKYP) to complete the make your mark surveys and responses to these had numbered more than 1500, exceeding that received for the previous year. The collated data from the surveys would determine the subject of the national and local campaigns. Efforts were also currently being made to encourage BYP members to join the Voice of the Child sub group of the LSCB. It was further highlighted that BYP members would be on the Panel for the Question Time event scheduled for Monday 14 October 2013

The committee thanked Roisin Healy for her update.

RESOLVED:

that the update on the work of the Brent Youth Parliament be noted.

10. School Places update

An update on school places within Brent was provided to the committee by Sara Williams (Director of Children and Families). The committee was advised that for secondary provision there were currently plenty of places for Years 7, 8 and 9 but that places for Years 10 and 11 were becoming very restricted, with approximately 50 to 70 new pupils arriving in the borough per week. Placing children in Years 10 and 11 required assessments to be undertaken and was becoming increasingly difficult to achieve.

Sara Williams subsequently outlined the position for Primary School places. Members heard that there had been sufficient Reception year places for all on-time applications; however, there had been over 600 late applications received, approximately 200 more than the previous year. The unexpected increase in applications had resulted in considerable challenges for the council, despite there having been a significant number of additional school places created for September 2013. Further provision was currently being created and extra places would be available in January 2014, with offers being made as of the forthcoming half term. At the present time there were 41 Reception year vacancies in Brent Schools and

161 reception year pupils without offers of school places. The council was currently exceeding schools' admission numbers by placing children using the Fair Access Protocol. There were very few vacancies available in Years 1 and 2 and a new Year 1 class would be opening in January 2014. Brent's schools were facing significant challenges with a disproportionate number of high-need pupils arriving in-year and a large turn over in school population. Sara Williams emphasised that it becoming increasingly difficult to continue to expand schools in Brent and a lot of work was taking place with Schools' governing bodies.

During Members' discussion, the committee requested information on the geographical areas for which there was greatest demand for school places and asked that the next update include details of the number of children attending school out of borough. With reference to the challenge of creating sufficient provision to meet demand, it was queried what measures the council was able to use to persuade and require schools to expand. It was noted that there was a proposal to create a primary free school in Dollis Hill, with an intended opening date of September 2015, and a question was raised on whether this would lead to surplus capacity at that time. Further details were sought regarding how the council was supporting schools in meeting the current challenges. A Member advised that he had received several complaints from residents regarding school admissions which had been quickly resolved following his intervention. It was commented that it should not take the intervention of a councillor to resolve issues.

Sara Williams advised that demand was particularly concentrated in the north of the borough including in Wembley and Willesden, near to Cricklewood. However, there were hotspots of demand all throughout the borough except in Brondesbury, Kilburn and along the Ealing border of Stonebridge. It was acknowledged that the borough would have to develop a specialism in assisting schools to meet the challenges faced. There had been a mixture of schools who had been reluctant to consider expansion. In response, the council had improved the information being provided to schools and was being as direct and forthright as possible with governors. The council was spending more in the process of creating additional places than other areas however, and was currently under pressure from the Department for Education to reduce these costs. The council did have powers to force community schools to expand but had not made use of these, preferring instead to work in partnership with Brent's schools. Councillor Pavey (Lead Member for Children and Families) explained that every other opportunity would be exhausted before compulsory action was considered. Sara Williams informed the committee that she was unaware of the free school proposal referred to but acknowledged that it was a difficulty that free schools could not be planned for in the same way as had been possible previously. Further information would be provided at the next meeting of the committee on updated projections of demand for school places.

Addressing the difficulties experienced in relation to school admissions, Sara Williams explained that the service was under considerable pressure in processing the level of applications received in the current circumstances. Additional staff had been employed, a dedicated phone line for schools had been established to ensure up to date information on vacancies was obtained, and the team was prioritising dealing with the applications received. This was a complex administrative task. Sara Williams added that unfortunately applicants were having to wait for school

places and noted that councillors had been doing a good job explaining the situation to their constituents, ensuring that applicants had realistic expectations.

Jenny Cooper (Teachers' Panel observer) noted that whilst expansion was necessary, there were negative consequences associated including pressure on shared facilities and loss of community cohesion.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

11. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

Mark Cairns (Policy and Performance Officer) emphasised that there were several weighty items scheduled for the next meeting. Members commented that the Short Breaks item scheduled for the December meeting could be deferred to a later meeting and the committee agreed the work programme be reviewed with the Chair and amended as required.

12. Date of next meeting

The committee noted that the next meeting was scheduled for 10 December 2013.

13. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 9.23 pm

H Gladbaum
Chair