



**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 5 February 2014 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Mitchell Murray (Chair), Councillors Aden, Al-Ebadi, Arnold, Gladbaum, and Kataria, as well as Co-opted Members and Observers, Ms E Points, Dr Levison, Ms J Cooper, Mrs L Gouldbourne and Brent Youth Parliament representatives.

Also present: Councillor Chohan

Apologies for absence were received from: Mr A Frederick, Sullivan, Ms C Jolinon and Councillor Pavey (Lead Member for Children and Families)

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2013 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters arising

Sara Williams (Acting Director of Children and Families) circulated a staff structure chart of the Children and Families department, as requested previously by the Committee.

4. Brent Youth Parliament update

A presentation was made to the committee by the new Brent Youth Parliament (BYP) Executive, elected in December 2013. The new BYP Executive members introduced themselves and explained their respective portfolios. The committee was advised that BYP worked with national youth organisations including the Youth Select Committee, United Kingdom Youth Parliament and Student Voice to promote countrywide campaigns and ensure Brent's youth were represented in national forums. An overview was provided of the current and planned work of the BYP, with topics such as BYP attendance, promotion of BYP in Brent, BYP budget management, and careers support and opportunities for young people, assuming particular focus.

The committee sought further details of how BYP worked with schools and youth clubs in Brent. It was explained that BYP worked with teachers and student councils to identify students who may wish to become involved with the work of BYP. Good

links were maintained with youth clubs and youth organisations via the council's youth workers. The committee suggested that Officers support BYP in making links with the council's Business Support Team, to assist BYP in building careers and work experience opportunities. It was further requested that councillors receive a copy of the BYP monthly newsletter.

The committee thanked the BYP representatives for attending the meeting and noted the presentation.

5. Schools Finance Update - 2013/14

Sara Williams (Acting Director of Children and Families) and Simon Lane (Head of Audit and Investigations) presented a report to the committee which provided an overview of financial management in Brent's schools, with detailed updates on audit outcomes and leasing arrangements. It was explained that though governing bodies held responsibility for the financial management of their respective schools, the Council was required to ensure value for money was being sought and sound financial systems and controls were in place. Simon Lane advised that there had been improvement in the financial management in Brent's schools since 2011/12 and drew members' attention to the audit outcomes provided for the current and previous three years. Assurance levels had improved in 2012/13 and the level of substantial assurance reports issued was currently 83% for 2013/14. It was noted this figure had increased from that reported as two further schools had been audited since the report had been written. Though two schools remained to be audited, no schools had yet been awarded a nil assurance rating for 2013/14.

Sara Williams highlighted the common weaknesses identified during audit work and explained that there were numerous systems in place to address these and support continued improvement. These included the provision of regular information and guidance via the Schools' Extranet, termly Bursar meetings, and a comprehensive training programme compiled using feedback from schools and in accordance with the council's evaluation of training needs. A review of the financial management services available for schools to buy-in from the council was also being undertaken to ensure schools were receiving the support they needed in carrying out their day-to-day financial management duties.

Turning to the subject of leasing arrangements, Simon Lane advised that the Council had in 2010 identified that a number of schools had entered into very unfavourable leasing arrangements with large finance companies for the hire of equipment such as photocopiers. The Council was of the view that these leases should be treated as being void from the outset, as the schools in question did not have the legal power to enter into them. Subsequently, an action plan had been established to help to extricate the worst affected schools from the disadvantageous leases. Six schools had since stopped paying the fees purportedly due to the finance companies, with the support of Brent Council. Legal action had been pursued by several of the finance companies; the majority of these cases had been settled, with favourable outcomes for the schools in question. There remained one case on-going before the High Court. It was emphasised that the council would continue its approach of taking a robust overt position regarding any legal action, whilst at the same time negotiating behind the scenes where appropriate.

During members discussion it was queried whether the audit team conducted follow up assessments to ensure that particular weaknesses identified during the audit were subsequently addressed by the schools. It was also queried whether the minutes of governing bodies' financial committees were reviewed during an audit. Information was sought on the attendance of schools at the termly bursars meetings and the uptake of the financial package offered to schools as a traded service. A query was raised regarding responsibility for audits of other aspects of the management of a schools, such as health and safety.

Responding to the issues raised, Simon Lane explained that follow up visits were conducted after a period of about 6 months and the council would take action within this period to ensure that common areas of weakness were addressed with all schools. Audits did include both a general review of the minutes of a school's financial committee, as well as a cross referencing activity with records of significant expenditure to ensure that that approval had been granted by the committee. Sara Williams informed the committee that attendance at the termly bursar meetings was good and that the council had a good relationship with schools. More detailed information regarding this matter and the uptake of the financial package could be circulated to the committee. The council was responsible for the health and safety of community schools. In meeting this duty, the council required all community schools to complete a health and safety self assessment, which was then scrutinised by the council's Health and Safety Officer and Health and Safety Committee. Schools could also buy in the services of the council's Health and Safety Officer for specific pieces of work.

The committee thanked the officers for their responses.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

6. The Pupil Premium and Brent Schools

The committee received a report from Sara Williams (Acting Director of Children and Families) on the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG), which had been introduced by the Coalition Government in April 2011. This grant had been established to enable schools to provide additional support for Looked After Children (LAC) and children from low income families and thereby tackle the attainment gap that existed between these children and their peers. The report provided an overview of the use of PPG in Brent's schools, the progress achieved in narrowing the attainment gap and the support provided by the Council to schools on best usage of PPG.

Sara Williams explained that the PPG was put to good use in Brent and this was evident in the educational achievement of Pupil Premium (PP) pupils. The report highlighted that the expected progress from Key Stage (KS) 1 to KS2 was well above the national average for the PP pupils. Similarly the expected progress from KS2 – KS4 was also in line with the national average for all pupils. Whilst the attainment gap did become more pronounced for secondary-aged pupils in Brent, this gap remained narrower than the national average. Examples of the initiatives funded via the PPG were set out in the report for both Primary and Secondary schools and included the running of booster classes, the provision of targeted support, subsidising extra-curricular activities, and access to art therapy and

counselling services. Sara Williams informed the committee that the Department for Education (DfE) had recently visited one of Brent's schools to observe how they achieved their particularly good results for PP pupils. This school took a creative approach to identifying pupils requiring additional support, using a range of indicators, including post code. Despite the successes achieved in Brent, it was considered that further work was required to ensure consistent good use of PPG across all schools. In particular, progress was desired in ensuring schools were confident in addressing multiple risk factors, for example, PP pupils for whom English was an additional language, or who had Special Educational Needs (SEN). The Children and Families Department, via its Services to Schools service and Link Advisers, was committed to working with schools to ensure the effective use of PPG. In addition written guidance, training and feedback was provided to Link Advisers, Head Teachers and Governors.

In the subsequent discussion members queried the income per year from PPG for Brent's schools. It was commented that post code could not be used as an accurate measure of pupil need when targeting support for pupils. A concern was also regarding the impact of the recent Welfare Reforms. Sara Williams advised that income from PPG per year could be circulated to the committee and confirmed that a school would use a wide ranging criteria to identify pupils who needed additional support; this could include post code and initial attendance but a school would not rely upon any one single indicator. Members were further advised that the number of pupils eligible for PPG had fallen across the borough. The changes to benefits had not had an immediate significant impact as the qualification for PPG required that a pupil had been eligible for free school meals at any point within the last six years. The movement of families out of the borough was closely monitored and it was considered that this was not a key factor in the fall in the number of pupils eligible for PPG.

The committee noted that it had in October 2012 received a report on the Council's Child Poverty Strategy. Since that time, the poverty rate had increased to 34 percent, as set out in the report before the committee. The committee had subsequently agreed that all reports it received should include a section on the child poverty implications. Sara Williams advised that it was no longer a requirement for local authorities to have a child poverty strategy and the council was currently undertaking work to ensure that the themes and actions identified in the existing strategy could be embedded in other strategies, such as the Employment Strategy.

The committee agreed that there appeared to have been delay, since the introduction of the Child Poverty Strategy, in overtly addressing child poverty in Brent and sought an immediate update on the work being undertaken in respect of this.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that an update be submitted to the next meeting of the committee on the work undertaken with regard to the Child Poverty Strategy and associated work to tackle child poverty in Brent ; and

- (iii) that an update report be placed on the agenda for the first meeting of next year's committee work plan. This update should refer to related concerns raised by the committee during and subsequent to its meeting in October 2012; refer to the child poverty implications set out in any reports to the committee; explicitly state which officers are responsible for carrying out the work; and detail any proposed actions resulting from the work.

7. School Places update

Sara Williams (Acting Director of Children and Families) advised that as at 3 February 2014 there were 0 children without an offer of a school place. There remained however, a small number of pupils for whom an offer of school place had not been accepted. Work was being carried out to ensure that offers of school places were taken up by families. There was also sufficient capacity for current demand due to the provision of a number of new sites. A report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Executive on meeting demand for the next year academic year. It would be necessary to create additional classes for September 2014.

The committee queried whether demand had been affected by families moving out of the borough due to the impact of the Welfare Reforms. Sara Williams advised that the number of families moving out of the borough was closely monitored and had been very few.

The committee thanked Sara Williams and noted the update.

8. Alternative Education, Attendance and Behaviour Services - update on service transformation project

Sara Williams (Acting Director of Children and Families) presented a report to the committee on the Alternative Education, Attendance and Behaviour Services One Council project; this project encompassed a fundamental review and redesign of these services to meet a complex range of policy, financial and operational challenges. It was explained that these services played a significant role in supporting Brent's most vulnerable children and young people, and included the provision of education to pupils excluded from or unable to attend mainstream school and the provision of pre-exclusion and in-school behaviour support. Sara Williams advised that the project had involved a significant reduction of staff and emphasised that there had been a lot of valuable trade union involvement in the process. It was also intended that the new service be co-owned with schools and in line with this, schools had been involved in shaping the new service.

Sara Williams drew members' attention to the factors which had driven the review highlighting that the new service aimed to provide better value for money and represented a more strategic service model with a heightened focus on preventative work. The new structure encompassed the amalgamation of the Key stage 3 and 4 Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) under a single Head Teacher and teaching staff; the replacement of the Brent Education Tuition Service (BETS) with a Health Needs Education Service, focussing specifically on pupils absent due to physical or mental health problems; and, a new multi-agency Inclusion Support Team to provide specialist support to pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties within the PRUs and indirectly, in schools. With regard to the

implementation of the new service structure, there had been some initial challenges relating to the recruitment to some of the managerial posts but these had since been tackled and interviews were now being held.

In the ensuing discussion, the committee was advised by Lesley Gouldbourne (Teachers' Panel) that the management committee for the new service had not yet met for the current term and that there were still some children attending the new Health Needs Education service that did not meet the criteria stipulated. It was further noted that £260k had been budgeted to commission provision for excluded Key Stage 1 and 2 aged pupils; however, with a cost per placement of £30 – 40k, this did not seem sufficient. The committee subsequently queried the trend of pupil exclusions and sought clarity regarding the savings achieved by the service restructure. A query was also raised regarding the offer of voluntary redundancies.

In response, Sara Williams advised that the management committee would have a programme of meetings timetabled going forward and was due to meet in March. With regard to the Health Needs Education Service, it was inevitable that some children who did not meet the criteria would occasionally be provided for by the service in the short term whilst suitable alternative provision was identified. There were few exclusions for KS1 and KS2 pupils and it was never more than three pupils at a time, thus the budgeted amount of £260k was considered to be sufficient. Details of the number of exclusions would be circulated to the committee.

Sara Williams further explained that the remodelling of the service had resulted in significant cost reductions, £480k of which had been directed towards commissioning new initiatives within the service. The full-year net cost of the new service, including the cost of the new initiatives, was estimated to be £4.787m, resulting in a £188,000 per annum saving; this remaining sum would be used to offset the historic deficit on the schools budget. Voluntary redundancies had been offered in two rounds as part of the restructure and applications were only accepted subject to the needs of the service.

The committee thanked Sara Williams for her contribution to the meeting and noted the report.

9. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be updated as detailed below:

- (i) that the report due to be submitted to the Executive on school expansion, including an assessment of all-through schools, be submitted to the next suitable meeting of the committee.
- (ii) that an update on that an update be submitted to the next meeting of the committee on the work undertaken with regard to the Child Poverty Strategy and associated work to tackle child poverty in Brent ; and
- (iii) that an update report be placed on the agenda for the first meeting of next year's committee work plan. This update should refer to related concerns raised

by the committee during and subsequent to its meeting in October 2012; refer to the child poverty implications

10. **Date of next meeting**

The committee noted that the next meeting was scheduled for 19 March 2014.

11. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm

Councillor Mitchell Murray
Chair