

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday 21 October 2009 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Motley (Chair), and Councillors Arnold, Beswick, Mistry and Tancred, together with Mr Akisanya and Mrs Bondzi-Simpson (voting co-optees)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families), Ms Cooper (observer – Teachers' Panel), Mrs Gouldbourne (observer – Teachers' Panel), Ms Jolinon (observer – Teachers' Panel), and Brent Youth Parliament representatives Rizwaan Malik and Kishan Parshotam

Apologies were received from Councillor J Moher and Dr Levison (non-voting co-optee)

1. **Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests**

Councillor Mistry declared a personal interest in relation to agenda item 5 – Building Schools for the Future (BSF) – in that she worked at Copland Community School. Accordingly, she remained in the room and took part in discussion on the item.

2. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 16 July 2009 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. **Safeguarding children in Brent**

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families) provided a verbal update for the Committee on the recently established cross-party body looking at safeguarding children in Brent. In the aftermath of the Baby Peter case Brent Council had set up a members' review of child protection, attended by the leaders of the three main parties, the parties' education spokespersons, the Chair of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Councillor Wharton, as Lead Member for Children and Families.

Councillor Wharton reported that recent legislation had increased the requirements on Councils in relation to corporate parenting, and it had been decided that, as the key relevant officers and members were already meeting to review child protection, they should also take on the issue of corporate parenting. The Council was required to establish a council for children in care to meet regularly with and make representations to members. This had duly been established, and the children themselves had chosen the title *Brent Care in Action*. A participation worker was working with the children, and the members' meeting had reviewed the structure and terms of reference of *Brent Care in Action*.

The members' group had reviewed the GCSE results of children in care. Historically, these had been poor, but investment a few years previously had led to increased resources to the teacher team supporting children in care, and the results had been much better in 2009, with 11 young people out of 40 having gained five

A-C grades, including English and Maths. These results compared well with those of other London boroughs and with those of Brent in the past.

Child protection indicators had also been considered by the members' group, which had noted a doubling of referrals over the past three years, particularly in the aftermath of the Baby Peter case. The number of children with child protection plans had doubled over the same period, although this could be as a result of better recognition of risk factors, as opposed to increased abuse. For example, the police now had much better child protection training, and were now making more referrals. The members' group also took note of serious case reviews, set up when it appeared that something had gone wrong and from which the Council needed to learn lessons.

Asked whether the number of referrals had increased because of the aftermath of the Baby Peter case, leaving fewer resources then available to prevent the cycle of neglect, Councillor Wharton told the Committee that he felt that the number of cases had been rising anyway, with better police training, but there had also been a sharp rise since the Baby Peter case. He felt that there was an element of nervousness. However, while it was not the case that more children were being taken into care, extra resources were going into the increased number of investigations. However, the Council had already put extra resources into the current budget to strengthen investigations, and Councillor Wharton did not feel that that resources used for investigations were necessarily taken from other areas. However, he acknowledged that, although the number of children in care was stable, there had been an increase in court proceedings, and this was likely to lead to an increase in the number of children in care.

The Committee was concerned that the balance of resources between investigation and prevention be monitored, and Councillor Wharton agreed to take this issue back to the members' group.

Krutika Pau (Assistant Director, Children and Families) added that the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) was now being used in co-located early intervention teams and that it should be apparent within a year that quick decisions were being made in relation to the social care threshold. Up to now many cases had been referred that did not meet the threshold. The Committee noted that locality-based social care would be discussed by the Committee at its meeting in March 2010.

RESOLVED:

that the verbal update be noted.

4. School places in Brent

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families) drew the Committee's attention to two written updates from officers on the supply of and demand for school places and an update on the situation at 20 October 2009. The reports explained that, along with other London boroughs, Brent was experiencing unexpected increases in applications for reception classes, with the increasing demand for school places in neighbouring authorities likely to increase the shortfall in Brent. At 20 October 2009 a total of 97 children in Brent were without a reception place. With 53 vacancies, this meant a net shortfall of 44 places, although more accurate figure would emerge at the end of October. There was a mismatch between where the vacancies were and where the unplaced pupils lived, and most

parents wanted a local school. In some cases the nearest offer had been up to 5 km away from a child's home.

While in previous years GLA projections of the number of children had been accurate, in the current year the number of applications had exceeded the projected number. Projections for the future indicated that the demand for reception places would peak in September 2010, but that the demand for places would continue to exceed supply for the next 10 years.

At 20 October 2009 the number of primary school children out of school and available vacancies was as follows:

	Children out of school	Number of vacancies		
		Community	VA/Foundation	Total
Year 1	37	23	21	44
Year 2	19	15	13	28
Year 3	20	44	130	174
Year 4	12	104	152	256
Year 5	23	52	132	184
Year 6	4	137	120	257
Total	115	375	568	943

In the current round of secondary transfer a total of 11 children remained unplaced. All 11 had been offered at least one school, if not two, which they had declined, and the admissions service would continue to track them until they secured a school place. There were vacancies at Cardinal Hinsley and Crest Boys' Academy. For the future, the ARK Academy would provide an additional 180 places in Year 7 from September 2010.

5. **Building Schools for the Future (BSF)**

Mustafa Salih (Assistant Director, Children & Families) provided the Committee with a verbal update on the progress of Brent's bid for BSF funding. The Council had not been successful in achieving a September 2009 start, but the government's intention was that another six authorities would start in January 2010, and a further six in March 2010. Brent was still in the running, and had re-submitted its readiness to deliver statement, having addressed issues raised. An announcement was imminent. It had been confirmed that Brent could include one other school in the first phase and, as Copland Community School had been next in line, it had now been added in. Advertisements had been placed to recruit staff to the key roles in managing BSF in Brent. Progress had been made, and the authority was hoping for a January 2010 start date. Feedback had been encouraging, and the process had been very competitive.

Asked about the likelihood of achieving a January 2010 start date, Mustafa Salih informed the Committee that it was difficult to say, but he was optimistic that, even after this date, investment in schools would continue, regardless of any political changes.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the verbal update be noted;
- (ii) that BSF remain a standing item on the Committee's agenda.

6. **Annual Report of Brent Youth Parliament (BYP) 2008-09**

Manveen Patwalia (Principal Youth Participation Manager) introduced the Brent Youth Parliament (BYP) Annual Report 2008/09, which set out the progress and impact of the BYP at the end of its second term, evaluating performance against the terms of reference agreed in November 2008. Manveen Patwalia reported that the monthly sessions had been very successful, and members of the BYP had worked actively on the campaign to break negative stereotypes of young people. BYP members had also been consulted on regeneration and the Council's sports strategy. The parliament had also responded to national consultation on proposed changes to the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) curriculum in schools. There had been liaison with the UK Youth Parliament, and some of Brent's young people would be attending a debate in the House of Commons. An end of year survey had been completed by BYP members, and the results had been generally positive. Following concerns that a one-year term was insufficient, there would be a two-year term in future, with an increased seat allocation. It was hoped by this means to represent young people who were hard to reach.

As part of the process of strengthening relations with the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it was proposed that future reports to the Committee contain a section on the views of young people. It was also proposed that the Chair of the Committee meet quarterly with the BYP Executive to have informal discussions outside the meeting.

Rizwaan Malik (representative of BYP) addressed the Committee on the BYP's campaign of breaking the negative stereotypes of young people. DVDs had been produced, and a copy would be left with the Chair for councillors to view. A nationwide survey of 15 questions had been launched, and it was hoped to receive 5,000 responses. Rizwaan Malik invited councillors to complete the survey, a copy of which had been emailed to them.

Kishan Parshotam (representative of BYP) drew the Committee's attention to a youth-friendly version of Brent's Children and Young People's Plan. A Youth Conference – with 150 young people and 50 adults – was being organised for 13 November 2009. The Deputy Children's Commission for England would be attending, and Kishan Parshotam also invited members of the Committee.

Members welcomed the report and congratulated the BYP and the Council officers supporting it on their work. They welcomed the proposal that the views of young people be reflected in reports to the Committee, and suggested that this happen more widely within the Council. Councillors also expressed an interest in receiving copies of the youth-friendly version of Brent's Children and Young People's Plan. They also recommended that invitations to the 13 November conference be issues as soon as possible.

Manveen Patwalia welcomed a suggestion from a member of the Teachers' Panel that a group from the BYP spend a day in, for example, special schools, in order to help the BYP contact particular target groups.

Krutika Pau (Assistant Director, Strategy and Partnerships) praised the work of the BYP and the Council officers supporting the BYP, recognising that the BYP was a very organised group of young people, supported by officers doing very intensive work with them. The Chair thanked the BYP representatives and officers for their work.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the Committee note the good progress made by the BYP in its second term;
- (ii) that the Committee endorse the changes proposed for the next term around the extension of members' terms to two years and the proposed increased in seat allocation;
- (iii) that, where applicable, and recognising that a suitable process needed to be put in place, reports submitted to the Committee in future should have a section on young people's views, demonstrating how young people were involved in discussion of the subject matter and their views given due weight;
- (iv) that the Chair of the Committee have quarterly meetings with the BYP Executive to discuss issues raised by the BYP, as well as issues coming to the attention of the Committee, to ensure that young people are at the heart of discussions and decisions relating to services for young people in Brent.

7. **Scope of Youth Services Review**

Karin McDougall (Manager, Brent Excellence Support Team) introduced the report and answered questions from the Committee on the scope of the review of services for young people in Brent. In response to councillors' concern that an efficiency target of £200,000 had been set against the budget for this area, Karin McDougall informed the Committee that all 12 of the Council's service reviews had efficiency targets, and it was a case of officers looking at how best to provide services in a smarter way. For example, the transformation of children's social care had been very successful, and efficiencies did not necessarily mean cuts in services. The proposed efficiency savings were set in the context of the Council's need to save £50m over the next four years.

Asked about the extent of consultation on the review, Karin McDougall reported that the net had been cast very wide, and anyone who provided services, including voluntary groups, was consulted. Focus groups would be used and neighbourhood ward working would also be involved.

Members of the Committee asked to be made aware if, as a result of the consultation, something was required for youth services, whether or not resources allowed for its provision.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the aims and scope of the review be noted;
- (ii) that the Committee be made aware of the needs of youth services, whether or not resources allowed for their provision.

8. Allocation and funding of nursery places

Mustafa Salih (Assistant Director, Children and Families) introduced the report and answered questions from the Committee on the new process for allocating and funding nursery places. He explained that universal nursery provision for three and four-year olds had been made available in 1998 through the allocation of government funding to local authorities and the inclusion of the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sectors as nursery providers. All children aged three and four, whose parents wished to take up the offer, were funded to receive 12.5 hours of nursery provision, which was the equivalent of a part-time place. Legislative changes on the number of hours to be provided and on funding arrangements for nursery places for three and four-year olds had led to a review of the arrangements in Brent, arrangements which had themselves led to inconsistencies in access to full and part-time places across the borough. In order to achieve transparency in allocating resources and effectiveness in raising standards for all children, as well as narrowing the attainment gap, a new process for funding and allocating nursery places had been developed, based on the use of a local single funding formula (SFF).

This was a complex area, and the authority had been working with schools and private providers for a year. A consensus had been reached, and the implementation of the SFF was a national development, requiring implementation by April 2010. Hourly rates had been arrived at, with supplements agreed relating to deprivation, flexibility and quality. The impact of the changes on providers had been analysed. The next stream of work would be to look at the allocation of full-time places, which was a Brent issue, rather than a national one. Historical and ad hoc arrangements had prevailed in the allocation of full-time places, but the funding formula would move the authority to a more consistent approach. As the government funded only 12.5 hours of nursery provision, the remainder of any full-time place was subsidised by the rest of the schools budget, so a coherent and transparent way of allocating full-time places was needed. Currently more places were offered than would be justified if assessed on the basis of need. An easy-to-understand basis was needed for applications for funding full-time places. In view of the fact that schools might lose funding as a result of the changes, the authority was working with organisations to ensure they understood the implications. The government was also aiming to introduce a means whereby parents could pay for the non-funded part of the full-time place.

The next steps included organising open days for providers, with a view to having the new funding arrangements in place by April 2010. Keen to minimise funding turbulence for providers, the authority was proposing a transition period of three years. Currently 4,635 children – of whom 1,161 had a full-time place – benefitted from free entitlement. Data from the Council's revenues and benefits service suggested that there were currently 1,920 children eligible in households claiming income support. Currently only 585 of the 1,920 were in full or part-time places. The Council's revenues and benefits service data suggested that, of the 4,635 currently receiving free entitlement, only 585 would be eligible for a full-time place, compared to the current 1,161.

Asked how many full-time places were wanted for which parents were prepared to pay in the maintained sector, Mustafa Salih informed the Committee that this was not yet known. Officers were visiting schools and looking into options for charging with a view to offsetting the loss of funding. Each school would be different.

Responding to members' concern that there would need to be a system of checks and balances, Mustafa Salih reported that this was part of the process the authority was working on. The aim currently was to look at the possibility of the admissions team, well used to dealing with applications and eligibility, administering the process. Lesley Fox-Lee (Head of Early Years) informed the Committee that the issues facing Brent were common to other London authorities, who were also dealing with a perception of schools' reduced offer. Answering a question on the expansion capacity of providers, especially in the PVI sector, Lesley Fox-Lee acknowledged the lack of community spaces, the variability of running costs and the fragility of providers' running arrangements. She suggested that the Council would need to think more corporately about this.

Members noted that the issue of funding and allocating nursery places would be put before the Executive in January 2010, with approval sought as part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The Committee agreed to reconsider the issue before it was presented to Full Council as part of the budget process.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that the issue of funding and allocating nursery places be brought back to the Committee after being considered by the Executive and before approval by Council.

9. **Performance Management of Children & Young People Plan 2008-09**

Anna Janes (Head of Planning, Information and Performance) introduced the report and answered questions on progress made by the Brent Children's Partnership Board in 2008/09 on delivering the strategic priorities identified in the 2006/09 Children and Young People's Plan.

Asked about the fact that the target for the number of SEN issued within 26 weeks had not been met, Anna Janes pointed out that this was due in the main to delays by other agencies, particularly NHS Brent. This had been raised with NHS Brent at Brent Children's Partnership meetings, and Brent's Director of Children and Families had written to the Director of NHS Brent about it. NHS Brent had acknowledged the problem and was looking to improve. Indeed, by the end of September 2009 there had already been an improvement.

In response to a question on the number of teenage mothers in education, Anna Janes pointed out that, because of the small number, the statistics could be misleading. In general the trend was towards a decrease in the number of teenage mothers, although the full impact of the recession was yet to be felt. Krutika Pau (Assistant Director, Children and Families) informed the Committee of a *Teens to Toddlers* programme whereby teenagers were introduced to the realities of dealing with young children. The Council was working closely with NHS Brent on jointly commissioned projects and work with targeted young people. Asked whether progress had been made with faith groups on the issue of teenage pregnancies, Krutika Pau reported that it had become easier than in the past for professionals to get into some of the faith schools.

Answering a question about the number of looked-after children in stable placements, Anna Janes informed the Committee that this was a complex criterion. Progress was improving, with the level currently at 67.5%, which was above the

national average. If progress continued, it should be possible to reach an aspirational target, linked to the *Invest to Save* programme. The recruitment of skilled foster carers was important in this, and marketing and publicity were currently being looked at, together with a focus on existing placements to keep them as stable and suitable as possible. Specialist payment rates for foster care had been introduced, but had made little impact so far.

Asked about the number first-time entrants to the youth justice system, Anna Janes pointed to an improving picture. Targets had been set across the whole of London, and Brent's target was not to exceed 425. The number at the end of September was 234. If this trend continued, the target would not be exceeded, and Brent was performing well compared to statistical neighbours.

During a discussion of the complex area of youth offending, which the Committee saw as a possible area for a task group, the Committee requested that the statistics distinguish between Black Caribbean and Black British young offenders.

In response to a question on the missed target relating to the number of young people with learning difficulties in education, employment and training, Anna Janes reported that performance had improved since the period under review. She reported that information on trends was available, and the Committee agreed that in future it would be helpful in assessing performance to have information from previous years, where comparable information was available.

In response to the Committee's concern at the low level of immunisation of children in Brent, Anna Janes reported that NHS Brent performed badly in this area compared to other London trusts, and this had been raised at the Children's Partnership Board.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that future reports on performance include available comparative data for at least the previous five years;
- (iii) that the Committee invite NHS Brent to attend a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss issues of concern to the Committee, such as the level of immunisation among children and the speed of trust's work on SEN statements.

10. **Final task group report on pupil safety on the journey to and from school**

Councillor Mistry introduced the final report of the task group on pupil safety on the journey to and from school. She informed the Committee that young people themselves had reported that they did not feel safe, with high levels of criminal activity between 3.00 and 5.00 pm outside school gates. The task group had spoken to a wide range of witnesses, including TfL and local bus companies, on measures to tackle bullying. For example, TfL was funding a pilot scheme whereby volunteers would act as escorts on buses, and the task group had asked for the frequency of the 245 bus to be increased.

Councillor Arnold, a member of the task group, felt the report and recommendations were very timely. The project was long-term and practical. She emphasised the need to get schools to take advantage of all available help and resources.

The Committee congratulated the task group on an interesting report, with sensible and practical recommendations that tapped into existing opportunities. The Committee recommended that the report and recommendations be included in the Crime Prevention Strategy.

A member of the Teachers' Panel reported that Oliver Goldsmith Primary School was taking part in a TfL scheme aimed at carrying out surveys, campaigns and interviews with parents and staff. Councillor Mistry expressed interest in organising a visit to the school, although she emphasised that the main thrust of the task group report was safety around secondary schools.

The Committee noted that the report and recommendations would next go to the relevant service review and to the Council's Executive. Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families) reported that the Executive held a regular liaison meeting with TfL at which the recommendations of the task group report could be discussed.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the 10 recommendations of the task group be formally approved;
- (ii) that the report and recommendations be forwarded to the Council's Executive;
- (iii) that the report and recommendations be included in the Council's Crime Prevention Strategy.

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to be held on Tuesday 15 December 2009.

12. Any other urgent business

- (i) Copies of the Committee's work programme were circulated to all present, and the Chair encouraged members to add suggestions.
- (ii) The Committee agreed to set up a task group on youth offending, and requested that a scope be brought to the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 10.10 pm

W MOTLEY
Chair