



MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 11 December 2012 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Mashari (Chair), Councillor Cheese (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Aden, Al-Ebadi, Kansagra, Pavey, Mr A Frederick, Ms E Points, Ms J Cooper and Brent Youth Parliament representatives

Also present: Councillor Arnold

Apologies for absence were received from: Mrs L Gouldbourne and Ms C Jolinon

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Minutes of the last meeting held on 11 October 2012

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2012 by approved as a correct record of proceedings.

3. Brent Youth Parliament update

Brent Youth Parliament informed the Committee of a recent successful trip to Parliament. Work was being undertaken to promote the new Roundwood Youth Centre opening and young people's views had been used to inform the choice of activity available and how the space would be used. It was noted that a Christmas Ball had been organised to help increase membership as well as awareness and that a campaign was being run to incorporate young people views which included a successful meeting at the Brent Children Partnership.

Brent Youth Parliament currently had 57 members and elections would be taking place on Saturday 15 December 2012 to elect five executive members, including a Chair and Vice Chair. It was explained that AQA accredited training would be taking place to ensure the importance of politics was understood and to offer an educational benefit to members.

The Committee noted the importance of the work being undertaken by Brent Youth Parliament, in particular the encouragement of arts based activities in light of the narrowing of the national curriculum. Brent Youth Parliament highlighted that they were keen to work with as many partners as possible and establish connections through forums and meetings with the next BYM2 forum meeting taking place on 18 December 2012, 5-6.30pm.

4. Plan for Children and Families in Brent

Anna Janes, Head of Children & Families Policy and Performance explained that the purpose of the report was to set out a three year partnership Plan for Children

and Families in Brent (PCFB). The Plan built on the achievements of the previous Children and Young People's Plan (2010-12) and brought together in a single document Brent's vision and key priorities for improving outcomes for children and families. It was highlighted that although the coalition government had revoked the legislation requiring the production of a plan however it was felt to be an essential strategic plan and demonstrated commitment to the children of Brent for the next three years. It was explained that the plan took a holistic approach which integrated the family and consisted of the following three priorities:

1. Ensure that children and young people in our borough are healthy and safe
2. Narrow the gap between those children who do well and those who need extra support to thrive, so the aspirations of every Brent child are realised.
Also to ensure that there are sufficient school places to meet the continuing increase in demand
3. To fully integrate services to develop resilient families

Promotion work with partners had been undertaken including posters and a briefing pack to ensure all partners were working towards priorities. It was noted that the Child Poverty Strategy Action Plan, which linked to the Children and Families Plan would be launched in January 2013. Given that the PCFB was a 3 year plan, the Brent Children's Partnership (BCP) Executive had agreed that the partnership would focus on two outcomes within the first year; children and young people being safe, protected from harm and neglect, and living free of poverty.

Anna Janes informed the Committee that the BCP executive had met to discuss issues surrounding the welfare cuts and how the impact on families could be reduced. It was noted that 1500 vacancies were reported across Brent job centres and courses such as CV writing were being offered to help parents back into work. Advice was also being offered to families to address the impact of the cuts and how they could be exempt from the benefit changes to avoid poverty being cast upon their family.

During discussion, it was highlighted that although initiatives were being undertaken to get parents into work, it was felt that the biggest barrier was the cost of child care. It was further noted that there were few jobs that offered suitable 'school hours' for parents with children attending school. It was explained that although a fund existed to provide 15 hours of free child care a week for children 2 - 3 years of age, it was felt that ways to make child care realistic needed to be explored. Sara Williams, Assistant Director Early Help and Education informed the Committee of the numerous breakfast and after school clubs in many schools across Brent. She continued to highlight that should a school feel that a pupil/family would benefit from a before or after school facility being available, then the pupil premium could be used.

Concern was expressed that the plan cited how Brent currently functioned and lacked inspiration during difficult times. Anna Janes explained that the policy looked at the family as a whole whilst working alongside the working with families' initiative as well as working with partners to align resources. It was further explained that monitoring of outcomes would be qualitative across partners and the impact of services would be measured against the feedback received from users which would further be used to develop the service. The monitoring across partners would be used to review the policy after each year so that the document

remained flexible and reflective of its purpose. It was noted that feedback on monitoring could be reported back to the Committee. The Committee noted the qualitative outcomes and felt that the action plan could have flowed through the report more, with greater radical initiatives.

The Committee noted the detailed outcome structure, timescales and how these would be achieved and queried the commitment of partners, and whether any obstacles had been identified. Anna Janes informed the Committee that two outcomes had been agreed as a focus with partners to ensure full commitment to achieving the outcomes and a lead officer during the away day had been assigned for each outcome.

The Lead Member for Children and Families explained that the plan was meant to be used as a dynamic tool to engage and work with families as a whole through enhanced partnership working to deliver services in a coordinated manner. It was further clarified that the report differed from most policies as partners had fed into the document and reported on outcomes collectively, as well as the plan continuously developing and evolving to the needs of Brent.

The Committee noted that no financial implications had been identified and queried how a difference could be made in times where cuts were being introduced. The Lead Member Children and Families explained that working with partners would become an effective resource in itself. Anna Janes further clarified that by having connections and understanding what partners were doing, duplication of work could be avoided, allowing resources to be used effectively as well as being able to access greater funding streams through greater knowledge of grant information available to partners.

The Committee felt that it was important that the private and voluntary sectors were involved and were represented within the plan. Anna Janes explained that greater voluntary and private sector involvement was required and as connections were made, this would be reflected within the plan. It was felt that private sector involvement would be harder to achieve but would be valuable especially as there were larger companies within Brent.

Brent Youth Parliament informed the Committee of an initiative where a pool of young persons wishing to volunteer for work placements within schools had been created and it was agreed that they would discuss the matter further with the Lead Member for Children and Families.

Discussion took place around the second priority and in particular school places. It was noted that this priority would not result in overcrowding or a lowering of educational standards and that infant class size legislation would still be adhered to. It was felt that narrowing the gap of education standards and meeting the demand for school places did not necessarily correlate together and should be recognised separately. It was clarified that school places were not restricted to borough borders and although almost 6000 pupils outside of the borough attended Brent schools, it was noted that the number of children from Brent attending schools outside of the borough was higher. Discussion progressed to the SCN path finder and despite the delays, it was noted that the legislation enabling it was progressing however work would not take place to rush ahead in terms of budgets going to families.

Councillor Pavey queried the additional support that was to be made available to parents under outcome seven. It was noted that these would be in the form of classes and it was agreed that further information would be provided to Councillor Pavey.

RESOLVED:-

- i. Members noted the content of the PCFB and that the priorities and outcomes will be fully integrated in service area plans and priorities
- ii. That regular updates be provided to the Committee and in particular how the Council and partners were meeting targets and outcomes

5. Working with Families Initiative

Sara Williams, Assistant Director Early Help and Education gave a presentation on the Working with Families Initiative. She explained that the initiative included the Council, with partners, assisting families with children and young people in need to ensure they enjoyed a good quality of life and developed as confidently and responsibly as possible. Family resilience was cited as being key to underpinning the project, particularly in light of the lack of early intervention services available to families. It was noted that there was a lack of co-ordination across services and partners with a whole system approach being required to ensure families did not fall through gaps.

Sara Williams explained that the troubled families initiative was a government based scheme which provided an initial fee and also paid upon results. It was hoped that by being able to address a families issues early, it would avoid them appearing later in the system and create savings in the long term. The Government had projected 120,000 troubled families within the UK, of which 810 resided in Brent. The scheme would last for three years, with 300 families being identified to be worked with within the first year of the project. A mapping exercise was currently taking place to establish the services and support currently being accessed by the 300 families identified, with a general approach with agencies to be agreed, particularly in terms of being assertive and persistent with families to realise that improvements need to be made. A multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) would be introduced to the civic centre to allow referrals to be streamlined and escalated appropriately, and reducing the potential of emergency cases being delayed. A family support service team with a key worker would be identified for each family, allowing the needs and requirement of the family to be coordinated and referrals to be made as necessary.

The Committee expressed concern that the project may evolve into addressing families in crisis rather than early intervention and queried how it would be rolled out further to ensure the best support for all. It was clarified that a child or family would only be part of the working with families' initiative if they had come to the attention of an agency. Sara Williams clarified that it was a more holistic approach as the key worker could determine potential issues earlier, rather than it escalating and affecting the entire family on a greater scale. It was highlighted that some

families would have a greater need than others and a set of national and local criteria had been identified to determine the families who would form part of the scheme. It was noted that the initial scheme was hoping to help 810 families as identified by central government and the payments by results and the savings achieved though children not entering the system at a later stage, would mean that greater work on intervention taking place in the future.

Members queried how success would be measured in order to achieve the payment by results. It was explained that a database would record whether a family's issues had been resolved. A family's issue could be considered resolved if a child was regularly attending school or no longer on the edge of care however it was noted that measurable outcomes would differ for each family. It was clarified that the payment would be received by the Council.

The Committee queried how the MASH would appear different and how the initiative would physically differ for a family. Sara Williams clarified that the MASH would incorporate all the relevant agencies to allow a referral to be made in conjunction with other agencies and to the same escalation standards. It was clarified that the physical difference for the family would be the key worker who would be looking at the family as a whole rather than the individual.

Members queried the quoted savings of £700,000, whether the savings were sustainable and how that figure had been determined. It was explained that the savings were hoped to be achieved through children not entering the system at a later stage and the money being reinvested. It was noted that further modelling on how the savings would be achieved needed to take place and would be circulated to the Committee.

RESOLVED:-

- i. Members noted the presentation
- ii. That information be provided to the Committee on how the projected savings are to be achieved

6. Corporate Parenting

Graham Genoni, Assistant Director Social Care Division, introduced the report which summarised the key issues relevant to Looked after Children (LAC) in Brent and set out the core principles that ensured the Corporate Parenting Group adopted a locally robust approach to ensure that LAC received at least the same standard of care as would be given by a reasonable and responsible parent. The Care Planning and Children in Care Service supported LAC and care leavers from 0-25yrs. The service comprised of four social work teams delivering a service to Looked after Children aged from 0 to 17 and Care Leavers from 18 to 21yrs (24 plus if the young person was in higher education).

It was reported that the current number of LAC in Brent was 338 compared to 410 previously, with a reduction in asylum seekers and Black Caribbean LAC. It was reported that the majority of children were housed in house foster carers which was approximately £300-£350 cheaper per week than using fostering agencies, with few children in residential children homes.

It was reported that all LAC had a personal education plan and a senior teacher working within the local authority was charged with ensuring improved educational achievements for LAC by tracking their progress. It was reported that a higher percentage of LAC were progressing into higher education as well as successful placements being achieved on the national and local apprenticeship schemes.

It was reported that the safeguarding and LAC inspection that took place in October 2011 rated the service overall as “adequate” with some good features. However, health outcomes for LAC in Brent were “inadequate”. The primary areas of concern were the timeliness and the quality of health assessments. A Health Action Plan was developed by Brent Primary Care Trust as well as monthly meetings being held by the Care Quality Commission to review and monitor the plan. Additionally, a nurse had been hired to address sexual health which had seen a successful reduction in the rate of teenage pregnancies.

Graham Genoni circulated a comparison of Corporate Parenting Groups across several boroughs and noted that they were similar to Brent in terms of constitutional makeup and the issues which they covered.

During discussion members queried that there were no actual parent representatives on the group. It was clarified that there were children and young person’s representatives and that many of the officers and Councillors would also be parents themselves. Members also queried the level of support offered to care leavers when moving into their own accommodation. It was clarified that a care leaver would be given a choice of flats which they would normally visit with their social worker. A fixed future programme will be created with training into basic skills such as changing a fuse etc to assist with the transition from childhood to adulthood. The Chair requested examples that were operating differently to Brent and details of the pros and cons of these models. Members were interested in models adopted by council’s where members had more involvement and even take on more responsibility and ownership for the child as a ‘case’. Members feel that there was a lack of personal touch with Brent’s model such as regular birthday cards not being received by a child. Councillor Pavey requested further information on the educational attainment of Corporate Parented children going to university. The figures in the report didn’t show percentages and how Brent rated in comparison to similar authorities. He requested for confirmation of how many children had attended university and how many had successfully completed their course and achieved a degree, if available. The Chair requested a copy of the current care action plan and how many meetings had taken place in the last 24 months with children in attendance.

RESOLVED:-

- i. Members noted the report
- ii. That further information be provided regarding Looked after Children and university figures
- iii. That information be provided to the Chair regarding the care action plan and meetings

7. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

The Chair requested an update on the recent LAC and Safeguarding inspection. The Lead Member for Children and Families informed the Committee that an interim single agency inspection had taken place with a finding of adequate.

The Chair queried whether there were any additional items to be placed on the work programme. Councillor Al Ebadi requested that the PSHE curriculum be placed on the agenda with particular reference to the sexual education programme delivered in schools. It was noted that an update on school places should be provided at each meeting and a copy of the 'School Places Provision in Brent' newsletter circulated to governors would be provided to the Committee. It was noted that there were numerous items which had not been scheduled to a particular meeting and it was agreed to keep this in check.

RESOLVED:-

- i. That the PSHE curriculum be added to the work programme
- ii. A copy of the newsletter be circulated to the Committee
- iii. Unscheduled items would be addressed
- iv. Members noted the work programme

8. Date of next meeting

The Committee noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on 12 February 2013.

9. Any other urgent business

None

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm

R Mashari
Chair