



Brent

MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Wednesday 29 March 2017 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Ketan Sheth (Chair), and Councillors Conneely, Jones, Shahzad, and Moher (Substituting for Councillor Nerva) and co-opted members Ms Cargill, Mr A Frederick, Ms Yaqub, Dr Levison and appointed observers Mrs Gouldbourne and Ms Roberts

Also Present: Councillors M Patel

Apologies were received from: Councillors Hector and Nerva

1. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

Councillor Moher advised that she was attending as a substitute member for Councillor Nerva who had submitted apologies for the meeting. Apologies were also received from Councillor Hector.

2. Declarations of interests

The following personal interests were declared with respect to agenda items 6 and 7, 'Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) - Update on Specialist provision and the implementation of the SEND Reforms' and 'Annual School Standards and Achievement report 2015-2016':

- i) Councillor Sheth as a governor at St Joseph's Infant School and St Joseph's Junior School and as a member of the Board of Harrow College.
- ii) Councillor Conneely as an employee of a local charity which undertook outreach work in some Brent schools;
- iii) Councillor Jones as a governor of St Joseph's Primary School;
- iv) Mr Frederick as Chair of the All Saints Trust;
- v) Mrs Yaqub as founder of a charity which undertook work on engaging with parents and carers of children with special educational needs.

3. Deputations (if any)

None received.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 1 February 2017 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. **Matters arising (if any)**

There were no matters arising.

6. **Order of business**

RESOLVED: that the order of business be amended as follows:

7. **Annual School Standards and Achievement report 2015-2016**

A report reviewing school standards and achievement for 2015-2016 was presented to the committee by John Galligan (Head of Setting and School Effectiveness). Members heard that in 2014, 78 per cent of Brent's Schools were rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding. At this time, the Education Commission had set Brent a target -that all of the borough's schools be good or outstanding. Meeting this target had been the aim of the Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness in Brent 2014-17. Currently, 96 per cent of Brent schools are judged good or outstanding by Ofsted, well above the national average. The arrangements which had supported this improvement were outlined to the committee. Collaborative, school led partnerships were now a key feature of Brent's education provision. In particular, the support provided by partners including the Brent Schools Partnership and the borough's two Teaching School Alliances contributed greatly to the improvement of schools. Head Teachers Karen Giles, Jane Jardine, Theresa Landreth and Laura Wynne were introduced to the committee and their key roles in providing school to school support and raising school effectiveness across Brent explained.

John Galligan further advised that Brent had performed well against the national averages in 2016 for the primary and secondary headline attainment measures but was below London at the end of Key Stage 2 and just below London at the end of Key Stage 4. The borough performed very well in measures of pupil progress. It was significantly above the national averages at both key stages, and above the London average at Key Stage 4 and in mathematics at Key Stage 2. The committee was advised that, as a consequence of performance measures for schools and colleges being changed in 2016, it was not possible to make comparisons with previous years.

In the subsequent discussion, the committee queried whether the commitment for all Brent schools to be judged good or outstanding by 2017 would be met. Further information was sought regarding Brent's performance relative to other London boroughs and members queried how the council would avoid complacency to support continued improvement in Brent's schools. Further details were sought regarding the role of the Strategic School Effectiveness Partnership Board and the committee questioned the work being undertaken on the new Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness due later in the year. Members highlighted the importance

of good school governance, sought further information about school to school support and queried the council's role in ensuring the contribution of school leaders with proven expertise and experience. It was subsequently queried how the council identified schools requiring intervention, the timing and nature of that intervention and why Interim Executive Boards had been put in place in two Brent schools. Questions were raised regarding the recruitment, training and retention of governors and teaching staff. The committee raised several queries regarding improving attainment for underperforming groups, including the specific projects undertaken and organisations engaged, and an explanation was requested of the variation of attainment across the borough.

In response, Gail Tolley (Strategic Director, Children and Young People) advised that there were two schools with a current Ofsted rating of requires improvement which were not due to be inspected until the following year and one which was due to be inspected in 2017; however all other schools in the borough were now judged good or outstanding. The rate of improvement that this represented was rapid and Brent was one of the best performing boroughs against this measure both in London and nationally. To sustain this progress, the strong partnership working and focus on achievement and progress for all children needed to be maintained. John Galligan advised that the council, in discussion with school leaders, was now looking specifically at local priorities for Brent in driving forward the quality of provision and this was reflected in the forthcoming Strategic School Effectiveness Strategy. The delivery of this strategy was supported by the Strategic School Effectiveness Board which provided a strategic hub for partnership working. Head Teachers Theresa Landreth, Laura Wynne and Karen Giles outlined their experiences of providing school to school support including expounding the role of specialist centres and consultant head teachers. The committee heard that this support was often very carefully brokered through the Setting and School Effectiveness Service.

Addressing queries regarding formal intervention in schools, John Galligan advised that the School Effectiveness team monitored schools by reviewing the School Effectiveness matrix, a comprehensive dataset on schools which included information on exclusions, attainment and leadership. Where risks were identified, a proactive approach was taken and school to school support brokered. If formal intervention was required, this would usually be in the form of a rapid improvement group to address insufficient challenge from a governing body. It was emphasised that since the introduction of the Strategic Schools Effectiveness Strategy, there are now no schools in Brent judged inadequate by Ofsted. The importance of robust governance and the role that the local authority had in challenging this was highlighted. Part of the role of the School Effectiveness Lead Professional was to provide advice on the training offer for governors and to sign post to the Brent Schools Partnership where appropriate. Informal support was also provided to governors through school to school arrangements. Co-opted Member Alloysius Frederick advised that, as one of two National Leaders of Governance in Brent, he worked closely with schools to offer support in this area.

John Galligan advised that the challenge previously provided by the committee regarding underperforming groups had ensured that this issue had been at the forefront of the agenda for school improvement across all schools in Brent and school effectiveness partners. Some governors were providing robust challenge on this issue; though there was still lots of work required. Karen Giles expressed the

view that the key to addressing this was less about the specific projects and more about ensuring good practice on a day to day basis in schools, identifying individual needs and personalising learning. Theresa Landreth added that the relationship with parents and raising the aspirations of parents for their children was another important element of the work required to improve the attainment of underperforming groups. Local community groups were engaged as part of this work including the Reach Society, a nationally acclaimed organisation led by Black men in the community. Addressing concerns regarding variation in attainment, Karen Giles advised that this depended on a range of factors from the variation in characteristics of the children, leadership at the schools and recruiting and retaining good teachers.

Gail Tolley emphasised the important contribution that Members could make to ensuring good governance in the borough's schools. As leaders within their communities, Members were well placed to identify local residents with the skills, knowledge and experience to become excellent school governors. The committee was therefore asked to encourage Members to take an active role in encouraging and nominating local residents to become school governors.

The committee commended the emphasis placed on supporting underperforming groups to achieve improved attainment and RESOLVED:

- i) that the Annual School Standards and Achievement Report 2016/2017 detail the progress made in raising attainment of identified underperforming groups and provide case studies illustrating the strategies employed by schools;
- ii) that a report on the impact of the new National Funding Formula on Brent Schools be brought to a future meeting of the committee;
- iii) that Members be encouraged to take an active role in encouraging and nominating local residents to become school governors.

8. Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) - Update on Specialist provision and the implementation of the SEND Reforms

The committee received a report detailing the progress made in delivering reforms to services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). These reforms were required following the introduction of the Children and Families Act 2014 and a new SEND Code of Practice in 2015. Drawing members' attention to the main changes in this new Code of Practice, Sandra Bingham (Head of Inclusion), highlighted that these were quite far reaching and included replacing Statements of SEN with Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans. Further changes included involving children and young people and their parents in decision making, a stronger focus on promoting high aspirations for children and young people with SEND, and a greater emphasis on supporting successful transitions to adulthood. The requirements to pursue joint commissioning with health and to publish a 'local offer' (a single point of information regarding support, services and opportunities in the borough for SEND children and young people) had also been introduced.

Members heard that Brent was progressing well with regard to these changes. Sandra Bingham explained that the council was on track to meet the 2018 deadline

for converting Statements of SEN to EHC plans. New innovative ways of working to involve parents and young people in decision making were being explored and implemented, including the offer of a co-production meeting with parents and young people in the development of EHC plans. The Westminster Society had been engaged to facilitate the Parent Carer Forum, which had been struggling under the burden of administrative tasks. The administration would now be managed by the Westminster Society thereby allowing more time for participation of the forum's membership in the development of SEND services with the local authority. The committee was further informed that work had been undertaken with partner agencies and schools to develop a transition protocol to support a seamless transition into adulthood and ensure that young people could exert choice over their lives. Similarly, joint commissioning of services was underway and the council was working closely with health colleagues around paediatric therapy, speech and language and occupational therapy services. The Brent Local Offer had been published in 2014 and feedback on this was welcomed. Sandra Bingham concluded her introduction of the report, noting that demand was growing for specialist provision in Brent and the council was exploring how this could be developed locally.

During the following discussion, members queried how well Brent performed in identifying children with SEND and in providing effective support to improve outcomes and life chances. Members also sought further details on the improvement made to outcomes as a result of the introduction of EHCs over Statements of SEN. An assessment of the success of partnership working with health services was requested. The committee questioned the level of engagement with parents in co-production meetings regarding EHCs and sought further details of the track record of the Westminster Society. Noting the small number of placements provided in the successful internship scheme, a member queried how work on post-16 opportunities could be improved.

Several queries were subsequently made regarding the transition from SEN statements to EHC plans, including whether the 2018 deadline would be met, whether the target of completing 473 of these by December 2017 would be met and why 14 per cent of new EHCs were not completed within the required 20 week timescale. Members questioned how the borough was meeting rising demand for specialist provision and what the consequences were for children who were placed in out of borough provision. Officers were asked to comment on the skills and resources of mainstream schools to support children with SEND. Noting the fall in the number of parents seeking to appeal local authority decisions at tribunal, a member sought assurance that the decrease reflected parents' satisfaction, rather than any difficulties in submitting an appeal. It was further noted that a number of tribunal appeals were discontinued due to new evidence being submitted and the committee questioned what measures the council took to avoid such situations arising. Members' questions were concluded with a query on the council's readiness for an inspection under the new joint inspection arrangements.

Responding to the queries raised, Sandra Bingham advised that a self-evaluation form had been completed for the forthcoming SEND inspection which indicated that the early identification of SEND was a strength in Brent. SEND was a priority group with regard to attainment and the council was working with schools to identify and share good practice. The impact of EHCs, particularly on attainment, would be measured over the coming year; however, the focus of the plans was on long term

outcomes for the children and young people. As part of the EHC process, parents were offered the opportunity to attend a co-production meeting and uptake of these was increasing. It was hoped that involving parents at this stage would result in increased satisfaction with the resulting plan and reduce the number of appeals via tribunal. The Westminster Society had a proven track record of supporting parental engagement in other boroughs and a report would be brought back to the committee in the following year assessing the success of the arrangement. Jayne Jardine (Head Teacher Manor School) advised that there needed to be a collective focus locally and nationally on developing career pathways for young people with SEND as there were too few opportunities currently.

Sandra Bingham further advised that joint strategic commissioning with health was progressing well both strategically and at a practical service level, with good relationships evident between therapists, schools and parents. Gail Tolley (Strategic Director of Children and Young People) emphasised the need to ensure that funding for children from the CCG was sustained, given the focus in the health economy on Adult Social Care. The council was also actively challenging the outcome of the high needs block for the dedicated schools grant to ensure that there would be appropriate funding for SEND children.

Addressing queries regarding the conversion of Statements of SEN to EHC plans, Sandra Bingham advised that if there was no change to staff resources dedicated to the task, this would progress as intended and would be completed on time. It was sometimes not possible to complete an EHC within the statutory timescale due to the availability of the child or pressures on colleagues in meeting necessary deadlines. The rising demand for specialist provision had been met by expanding capacity of specialist schools and working with mainstream schools in the borough. Brent Special Schools Academy Trust has been established and plans to open a new free school hopefully in September 2018. In the meantime the Manor school will expand on a satellite site with 18 places. The new Free School, The Avenue aims to have 104 over the next few years. Special schools worked closely with colleagues in mainstream schools to help develop specialist provision in these settings. Children placed outside of the borough would not be disadvantaged in terms of the quality of the provision but could face increased traveling times and would not have the benefit of attending school within their local community.

Responding to concerns regarding parents' access to tribunals, Sandra Bingham referred members to the process detailed in the report, highlighting that it was now a requirement for mediation to be engaged in before progressing to tribunal. There was currently insufficient data to measure the impact of this new requirement; however, it was hoped that this had facilitated a fall in the number of tribunals. Parents could also access support in addressing concerns or progressing appeals from the Brent SEND Information and Support Service (SENDIASS). New evidence would be considered, even if submitted at the tribunal stage as it was essential that an assessment of a child was accurate and it was recognised that often this information had not been available previously.

Gail Tolley expressed her confidence that the Council was well prepared for the forthcoming SEND inspection.

The committee recognised that the future of the borough's children with SEND should be a borough-wide concern and commended the successes of the student

internship programme for young people with SEND. The committee subsequently RESOLVED:

- i) That a council-wide approach to maximising employment opportunities for young people with SEND be endorsed;
- ii) That the provision of council placements for the internship programme for young people with SEND be endorsed;
- iii) That Members be encouraged to maximise employment opportunities for young people with SEND via their connections with community groups, organisations and businesses in the borough.

9. Update on scrutiny work programme 2016-17

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

10. Any other urgent business

Dr Levison (Co-opted Member) informed the committee that after more than 25 years of fulfilling the role, he would be resigning as co-opted Member and that the current meeting had been his last. The Chair expressed his thanks to Dr Levison for the commitment he had shown and contribution he had made during his time as co-opted Member and on behalf of the committee wished him well in his future endeavours.

11. Date of next meeting

The committee noted that the next meeting was scheduled for 9 May 2017.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm

Councillor Ketan Sheth
Chair