



Brent

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**Wednesday 28 March 2018 at 7.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Ketan Sheth (Chair), Councillors Conneely, Hector, Nerva, Shahzad, Mr A Frederick and Goulden

Also Present: Councillors M Patel (Lead Member for Children and Young People) and Councillor Mashari

**1. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

Apologies were received from Councillor Colwill and appointed observer Lesley Gouldbourne.

**2. Declarations of interests**

The following personal interests were declared with respect to agenda item 6 'Annual School Standards and Achievement report 2016-2017':

- i) Councillor Sheth as a governor of the federation of 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, including with children of Irish Traveller heritage;
- iii) Mr Frederick as Chair of the All Saints Trust, Chair of Governors at St Gregory's Catholic Science College and as a National Leader of Governors.

**3. Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 28 February 2018 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting, subject to the following amendment: Minute item 8, resolution vi) be amended to include the committee's request to have a greater level of detail provided including information about resources and outcomes.

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

There were no matters arising.

## 5. Annual School Standards and Achievement 2016-2017

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director, Children and Young People) introduced the Annual School Standards and Achievement 2016-2017 report and advised that colleagues Rose Ashton (Head teacher – Chalkhill Primary School) and Danny Coyle (Head teacher – Newman Catholic College) were present to help address the committee's queries, along with John Galligan (Head of Setting and School Effectiveness), and Councillor M Patel (Lead Member, Children and Young People).

John Galligan outlined the key headlines from the report, advising that the quality of education provision in Brent had continued to improve, with overall effectiveness at the highest ever recorded for Brent (96 per cent of schools judged good or outstanding at the end of the last academic year). The committee heard that progress of pupils at primary and secondary was well above the national average, with Brent achieving the second highest measure of progress in England. Commenting on the 2017 to 2020 improvement priorities set out in the report, John Galligan advised that these had been agreed by the Strategic School Effectiveness Partnership Board (SSEPB), following consultation with partners and the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee's examination of the Annual School Standards and Achievement Report 2015-2016. The priorities included building leadership capacity across the borough, including headteacher succession planning; ensuring that school governance met national quality expectations, and governing boards were equipped to challenge school leaders to address the underperformance of groups in their schools; raising the standards and progress of pupils at the lowest performing schools; and, raising the attainment of priority groups.

John Galligan detailed the actions taken and improvements made in relation to the priorities, highlighting amongst others: the value of school-to-school support; the launch of the council's "Developing strong governance across all Brent Schools" programme; the designation in 2017 of Chalkhill Primary School as the Brent Schools Partnership's (BSP's) specialist centre for the achievement of Black Caribbean pupils and the associated work being undertaken to raise attainment; and, the BSP's conference "Success for All" held in February 2018. In concluding his presentation, John Galligan emphasised that there had been significant improvements made but there was still work to be done to support improved attainment for all groups and the council and its partners continued to work hard to achieve the improvement priorities.

The Chair thanked the officers for the introduction to the report and invited questions and comments from members of the committee.

Members subsequently sought comment on the target to have 100 per cent of Brent's schools as rated good or outstanding by Ofsted and sought confirmation of a timeline for achieving this goal. The committee requested an overview of the framework for the education sector including the role of the Regional School Commissioner and the council's interaction with academy and free schools. Concern was expressed that the improvement in attainment for priority groups had not been achieved to the degree hoped, despite the actions and plans identified in the report for 2015/16. The committee questioned whether these actions were insufficient and whether officers were confident that all schools in the borough were committed to the measures required to raise attainment for the priority groups.

Comment was sought on the role of other professionals, such as education welfare officers, in supporting improved attainment for priority groups and it was questioned whether children in these cohorts were more or less likely to be attending underachieving schools. Members questioned whether schools had governors who reflected the priority groups. The committee sought explanation of why Brent schools did not always perform above the London attainment average and questioned the reasons for the variation in pupil attainment across Brent's schools. Questions were raised regarding the measures that could be taken to improve the recruitment and retention of teachers. Members sought confirmation that specialist EAL teachers were utilised in schools where needed. In concluding their questions, the committee queried whether specific targets for attainment had been set for the 2017/18 year.

Responding to the queries raised, Gail Tolley explained that there were three schools (one secondary and two primary) that did not currently have an Ofsted judgement of good or above. As not all of these schools were due to be inspected within the target timeframe, it would not be possible for 100 per cent of Brent schools to hold good or above ratings within this period. However, it was anticipated that one of the primary schools would improve their rating to 'good' when next inspected at the end of the next academic year or start of the following year. The other primary school had previously received a rating of good, but this had fallen to 'inadequate' following a new inspection, due in part to safeguarding concerns. As a consequence, the school was required to convert to academy sponsored status, which would be enacted as of 1 April 2018. John Galligan outlined the improvement work that had been undertaken with the school, explaining that a rapid improvement group had been established and an interim head teacher appointed in September 2017. The head teacher had experience of similar contextual challenges to those being tackled by the school and was the safeguarding lead within the BSP. An internal review had since evidenced that safeguarding was effective in the school and there had been significant improvement in the quality of provision of Early Years. The school's improvement journey would continue via the sponsor's raising achievement board.

Commenting on the relationship between the council and the BSP, Gail Tolley advised that the work of the SSEPB, was underpinned by credible and trusting professional relationships. Equally, a strong working relationship was maintained with the RSC, who was responsible for co-ordinating the response where concerns were raised regarding the performance of academies or free schools. Danny Coyle emphasised that the level of partnership and collaboration in Brent was the best he had experienced in his 30 year career.

John Galligan addressed concerns about the level of improvement made for priority groups. It was emphasised that this was a long standing issue and required a sustained focus on delivering high quality teaching to meet the needs of priority groups. It was anticipated that the impact of the work being undertaken would begin to become evident in the following year's results. Rose Ashton emphasised that the relationship between the school and the parents was key in raising attainment and outlined examples of the improvement activity underway, including: working with governors to ensure schools were held to account; developing an audit tool to aid identification of priority need pupils; and the undertaking of further research and sharing of best practice. Rose Ashton confirmed that her school had governors

reflecting the priority groups and added that changes were also required to the delivery of national curriculum to make it more inclusive.

Gail Tolley advised that the Education Welfare Service worked with all Brent schools and was situated in the Early Help service, alongside the Inclusion Service. Noting that Brent was a net exporter of children to neighbouring borough schools, Gail Tolley added that these services were proactive in referring information to her for discussion with colleagues in neighbouring councils where appropriate.

John Galligan assured the committee that priority group pupils were spread across all of Brent's schools and almost all of these were rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. Gail Tolley emphasised that there was good evidence for the collaborative partnership approach employed in Brent in creating and sustaining improvement. The council would continue to strengthen that partnership and would explore additional ways to expand school-to-school support and school-led initiatives.

John Galligan acknowledged that there were schools in Brent with results below the London and national attainment averages but which had achieved good Ofsted ratings in recent inspections. The reasons for this apparent juxtaposition lay in Brent's high proportion of children arriving with little or no experience of formal education or at early stages of learning English. The progress made by these children in the initial stages of their education was not therefore captured by the usual academic tests and it was important to note that Brent's attainment at the end of Secondary school was in-line with London averages, evidencing that these children caught up with their peers. Addressing variation in pupil attainment between schools, John Galligan advised that the council provided challenge to schools on this issue. In many cases there were good reasons for variation in attainment, often relating to an initial focus on improving English language skills. It was confirmed that staff were employed to support those pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) and were an essential resource for Brent's schools. Gail Tolley emphasised that Ofsted had commented on how well the council knew Brent's schools and children.

Discussing recruitment and retention of teachers and other education professionals, Danny Coyle explained that it was the latter that posed the greater problem for his school, largely due to the cost of buying houses in London. The provision of key worker housing was therefore very important in supporting the retention of good staff. Rose Ashton highlighted the importance of good succession planning and supporting career progression for highly skilled and professional staff.

Gail Tolley confirmed that the local authority would expect to see continued progress in the following year's results and would continue to monitor and challenge schools to raise attainment levels above the London average. Each school would have set its own targets for 2017/18 and the local authority would provide challenge, along with the Regional Schools Commissioner, to help schools to meet their targets.

The Chair invited questions and comments from Samira-Caterina Monteleone (Brent Youth Parliament representative) who, noting the improvement in attainment for Somali Boys, questioned whether lessons could be learnt from the actions taken to support improvement for this priority group. Samira-Caterina Monteleone further commented that it was important to engage the young people directly and ask their

views of what support they think would help them. An explanation was then sought of the trend which saw the closing of the gap between boys and girl's attainment at secondary school.

John Galligan advised that Brent had a strong tradition of welcoming emerging groups, one of which was the Somali community. As part of this, there was lots of emphasis on building links with community groups and supporting families to understand and engage with the education system in Brent. This strategy had been very effective. However, for an established community such as the Black Caribbean community there had not historically been the same level of engagement. The importance of gaining young people's views on the support they required was accepted and the committee heard that the council held take-over days for young people each year. Addressing the query regarding the closing of the gap in attainment between boys and girls, Rose Ashton noted that providing positive male role models in secondary schools was an important factor. John Galligan added that there needed to be a greater focus on how the curriculum engaged boys and the type of activities taking place in primary and secondary settings.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting.

#### RESOLVED:

- i. That the committee's congratulations be extended to the Setting and School Effectiveness Service for the sustained improvement achieved and the awareness of the need for that improvement to continue.
- ii. That the committee write to the Brent Planning Committee, the Housing Scrutiny Committee and the OPDC Planning Committee, to encourage the maximisation of opportunities for the provision of key housing to be delivered via regeneration and other development projects.
- iii. That the Strategic Director Children and Young People include within the Member Induction session on Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting a section on the educational landscape.
- iv. That the committee write to central government to advocate for the national curriculum to be made more inclusive and accessible for BME children.
- v. That the Setting and School Effectiveness Service continue to focus on the priority underachieving groups.
- vi. That the Setting and School Effectiveness Service ensure the successes and lessons learned from the significant work undertaken to support improved attainment for Black Caribbean boys be applied to the other priority groups identified of Somali boys and girls, and travellers of Irish heritage.
- vii. That the governing boards of secondary schools be recommended to:
  - a. actively promote and encourage girls to consider careers in traditionally male-dominated professions;
  - b. consider how to address the gender gap in progress made in attainment during secondary school;
  - c. actively engage under-achieving pupils in dialogue to ask what

support they feel they need.

## 6. **Signs of Safety**

Gail Tolley (Strategic Director, Children and Young People) noted that the committee had previously considered a Task Group report on Signs of Safety at its meeting in February 2017. Signs of Safety was a practice framework for working with children and families and child protection. The committee had endorsed the Task Group's four recommendations, including the recommendation that the committee receive annual updates from the Lead Member for Children and Young People on the implementation of Signs of Safety in Brent. The report before the committee was the first such update to be presented.

Gail Tolley explained that the Council, having previously participated in Phase 1 of the England Innovations Project for Signs of Safety, had been successful in bidding to participate in Phase 2 (EIP2). This project provided the council with 2 years of resource to further embed Signs of Safety in Brent and would enable the council to continue to work with project leads, Professor Eileen Munro, Andrew Turnell and Terry Murphy (child protection consultants, MTM consultancy).

Brian Grady (Operational Director, Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy) introduced the update report to the committee, outlining both the progress that had been made in implementing Signs of Safety in 2017/18, and the impact of this progress. It was highlighted that leadership of practice change was key to ensuring Signs of Safety was embedded and sustained and all senior leaders were modelling Signs of Safety with practitioners. Quality assurance processes had also been improved, helping to evidence the increased up take and more consistent use of Signs of Safety in the council.

Brian Grady highlighted the use of Signs for Safety in Child Protection Conferences as an indicator of success, with rates of children subject to a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time at 12 per cent in 2016/17, lower than statistical neighbours and predicted to fall further in 2017/18. Child Protection Conferences were also a key forum for using Signs of Safety with parents and carers and feedback from parents and carers on the conferences had been very positive. Brian Grady concluded his introduction by noting that Brent Council had demonstrated its commitment to continue embedding Signs of Safety by developing the Brent Practice Framework, launched in March 2018, and by realigning social work services in January 2018 to mirror best practice.

In the subsequent discussion, the committee questioned the degree of progress made in fully embedding Signs of Safety in the council and, whilst welcoming the EIP2 funding, queried how Signs of Safety would be sustained after it ceased. Members sought details of how Signs of Safety had been received by social workers, what barriers hindered further progress, and how these barriers could be overcome. Questions were raised regarding agency staff including how to encourage movement from agency to permanent staff and whether the council recorded the issue on its corporate risk register. A member questioned how Signs of Safety improved life chances for children and comment was sought on the quality of multi-agency working and whether this was embedded in the Signs for Safety model. Noting that Professor Munro was referenced in the Task Group report as highlighting the need for professionals to be given space to admit mistakes, it was

queried whether this was something that the council actively supported and if so, whether this would be sustained under the pressure of a serious case review or similar. In concluding their questioning, Members sought comment from officers about what support was needed going forward to sustain the progress made.

Responding to the queries raised, Brian Grady noted that an EIP2 staff survey had been carried out in January 2018 to understand confidence and competence in the use of Signs of Safety. The results would be available in April 2018 and would allow the council to benchmark its implementation against the other local authorities and inform next steps in Brent. Gail Tolley advised that the Brent Practice framework incorporated Signs of Safety but also other ways of working such as Social Pedagogy and was a significantly funded initiative to develop tools and skills in Brent. The end result of the initiative was to ensure that the Brent Practice framework was fully embedded.

Stephen Gordon (Head of Localities) explained that the council now had specialists in Signs of Safety embedded in every social work team and whilst every social worker was required to undertake a two day Signs of Safety training course, it was intended that the specialist team member would take forward new research and learning. It was confirmed that Brent's social workers viewed Signs of Safety very positively and it was also held in a lot of esteem more widely in the social work field. Brent's use of Signs of Safety was therefore an attractive prospect for social workers considering working for Brent. Turnover in staff, though significantly improved, still presented difficulties for the pace of implementation of Signs of Safety. Stephen Gordon emphasised that Brent did not have difficulties attracting social workers, rather issues such as the cost of housing meant that those looking to settle down were not able to do so in Brent. Addressing the committees queries on agency staff, Brian Grady advised that the realignment of social work services had achieved a number of conversions of agency to permanent staff and added that money was not always the key factor, with issues such as stability of the post and the quality of management systems often very important. Gail Tolley confirmed that the recruitment and retention of social workers was on the Council's risk register. Four years ago, 66 per cent of social worker staff were agency staff; the council now had 80 per cent of social workers staff on permanent contracts.

Stephen Gordon commented that most of the multi-agency relationships in Brent were exemplary and advised that this was reflected in the fact that Brent was due to become one of the Metropolitan Police hub areas for Safeguarding. Signs of Safety supported good multi-agency relationships by ensuring risks could be broken down into a simple and understandable model, engendering confidence across the partnership. It was clarified that the model helped professionals identify factors of need and to measure the impact of intervention taken. Signs of Safety gave professionals the discipline of identifying family strengths ensuring that Children's Protection Plans involved the families.

Gail Tolley advised that she had been impressed with the attitude of staff in sessions she had recently attended with managers and frontline social workers, during which a number of staff had accepted her offer of meeting with her to provide challenge on their practice. Stephen Gordon asserted that Brent had a culture where social workers felt safe and could ask questions freely. This was a culture observed in supervision meetings and team meetings. Formal structures which supported this culture included reflective group supervision meetings held in every

social work team and in which social workers could bring cases of interest for open discussion. Stephen Gordon added that whilst Serious Case reviews were times of great anxiety and stress for all involved, Brent Council was better equipped than many others in his experience. Gail Tolley asserted that the council was by no means complacent and was conscious that there were still challenges to meet; however, significant progress had been made in recent years and members were asked to reflect on how often social workers were celebrated for the work that they did.

RESOLVED:

- i. That the Cabinet/new administration:
  - a. Embrace and promote a culture of celebration of the work of social workers
  - b. Maintain a commitment to ensuring that sufficient priority and focus on reflective practice is sustained in Brent's social work teams moving forward in the context of increasing pressure on resources.
  - c. Note the committee's view that if future proposed cuts to resources threaten the continued embedding and use of the Signs of Safety model, an impact analysis should be presented to the appropriate scrutiny committee for consideration.
- ii. That Cabinet and the Council Management Team note the committee's recognition of the significant value of the work taken to implement Signs of Safety.
- iii. That the committee write to the Brent Planning Committee, the Housing Scrutiny Committee and the OPDC Planning Committee, to encourage the maximisation of opportunities for the provision of key housing to be delivered via regeneration and other development projects.

**7. Update on the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2017-18**

RESOLVED: that the contents of the Update on the Committee's Work Programme 2017-18 report be noted.

**8. Any other urgent business**

The Chair thanked the members of the committee for their dedication to the work of committee over the past year and thanked council officers and other colleagues for their support and contribution.

The meeting closed at 9.23 pm

CLLR KETAN SHETH  
Chair