



MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 2 February 2012 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Gladbaum (Chair), Councillor Matthews (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Aden, Al-Ebadi, Harrison, Mr A Frederick, Ms E Points, Ms J Cooper, Mrs L Gouldbourne, Brent Youth Parliament representatives and Cheese

Also Present: Councillor Arnold

Apologies were received from: Councillors Mitchell Murray, HM Patel and Ms C Jolinon

1. Declaration of personal and prejudicial interests

Councillor Cheese stated that he was a member of the Advisory Board for the Kilburn Locality.

2. Deputations (if any)

There were no deputations.

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 8 December 2011

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 8 December 2011 were approved as a correct record.

4. Matters Arising

The Chair sought an update regarding the status of the following recommendations made at the last meeting of the committee on 8 December 2011: -

- (i) Review of policy for the provision of early years full time places

RESOLVED: -

The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to refer the report on the provision of full time early years places to the Executive and recommended that action be taken to address the two issues of concern to members:

- That a consistent appeals procedure be put in place in schools offering full time early years places for 3 and 4 year olds

- That steps are taken to promote the availability of places to the most vulnerable families, including those who are new arrivals to the UK where language could be a significant barrier to accessing services.
- (ii) Results of Ofsted Safeguarding and Looked After children Services Inspection

RESOLVED: -

That the Ofsted report, presentation and action plan be submitted to a meeting of the Executive for their consideration and to ensure they “own” the council’s response to the Inspection.

Priya Mistry (Policy and Performance Officer) advised that the agenda for the next meeting of the Executive had not yet been published but that this would be followed up.

5. **Brent Youth Parliament update**

The committee welcomed Thivya Jeyashanker, the newly elected Chair for Brent Youth Parliament. Thivya Jeyashanker informed the committee that elections for the BYP Executive had been held on 28 January 2012 and the results of the election were as follows: -

- Chair - Thivya Jeyashanker
- Vice Chair - Omar Mohamed
- UK Youth Parliament representative - Chante Joseph
- Deputy UK Youth Parliament representative - Priyesh Patel
- Media representative - Adam Massoud

Thivya Jeyashanker advised that the new executive would now decide on its priorities for the forthcoming year. The next meeting of the BYP would be held on 25 February and Thivya Jeyashanker noted that all councillors would be welcome to attend.

6. **Youth Offending Team Inspection**

Anita Dickinson (Head of Service - Brent Youth Offending Service) presented a report to the committee setting out the results of a recent inspection of the Brent Youth Offending Service (YOS). The inspection took place in September 2011 and was conducted by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP). Anita Dickinson explained that Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) in England and Wales had been established under the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act and formed part of the criminal justice system. YOTs worked with young people aged 10 to 18 years old who were referred via court order. YOTs were multi-agency and drew staffing and resources from a range of services including the Local Authority, the Police, the Probation Service and the Health Service.

Anita Dickinson explained that the inspection had examined a representative sample of offender cases to assess whether work had been carried out sufficiently

well against the HMIP criteria. Three key practice areas were assessed; Risk of Harm, Safeguarding and Likelihood of Re-Offending. The judgement scale utilised by HMIP related to the level of improvement required, with possible outcomes encompassing 'Minimum', 'Moderate', 'Substantial' and 'Drastic'. Brent achieved a 'Moderate' award for both Safeguarding and the Likelihood of re-offending with scores of 65% and 62% respectively. For Risk of Harm which related principally to Public Protection, a score of 59% had been awarded and it was judged that substantial improvement was required. Brent's scores were close to the National Average and were greater than the results currently published for other London Youth Offending Services. Five recommendations had been proposed by HMIP for Brent and an improvement Plan to address these recommendations had since been developed and agreed with HMIP.

Anita Dickinson emphasised that the inspection was focused on how well the required processes had been followed for each case rather than outcomes. As a consequence there was some question as to whether this type of inspection provided a full assessment of the quality of the service provided. In addition, immediately prior to the inspection the Brent YOS had been subject to a budget reduction of almost 30%. As many other London YOTs had experienced similar budget reductions a request had been made to delay the inspection for London, however, this had been unsuccessful.

In the subsequent discussion, members raised several issues and queries. Ms Elsie Points sought further information regarding the inspection judgement which stated that there was little evidence of joint working within the YOT. Councillor Mathews queried how well the Brent rates for reoffending compared to other London YOTs and sought further details on whether budget reductions in partner agencies had impacted Joint Working for YOTs. Councillor Cheese queried whether YOTs had any input for young people whilst they were in custody. The Chair sought further details regarding the Triage programme, referred to within the report. The Chair also queried whether there had been any noticeable increase in youth offending rates by Brent young people following the riots of August 2011.

In addressing the committee's queries, Anita Dickinson advised that the sample of cases reviewed during the inspection had unfortunately not evidenced the high level of Joint Working between Social Care and Brent YOT. However, the impact of reductions in budgets and in available funding had created challenges for Brent's YOT. The YOT had recently lost its Mental Health worker post as the funding for this had been withdrawn. This was deemed to be a significant loss to the team given the often complex needs of the young people with whom the service engaged. Efforts were now being made to compensate for the loss of this post by working closely with the Brent Centre for Young People. In addition, the recent inspection of Children's services had identified that cuts had not been coordinated across partner agencies and consequently many similar services had been reduced or removed. The impact of reduced service provision for children and young people, alongside other changes such as those affecting access to higher education, were significant factors influencing the potential for youth offending and reoffending.

Anita Dickinson further advised the committee that YOTs were required to report on reoffending rates as a key performance indicator, to the Youth Justice Board. A new measure of 'reoffending' was in the process of being introduced and consequently, it would prove difficult in future to compare reoffending rates with previous years'.

Brent's YOT had been successful in reducing both the frequency and seriousness of reoffending for many of those cases in which it was involved. However, there were some prolific reoffenders familiar to Brent's YOT. Where young people were placed in custody, YOTs continued to engage with them and their families and would raise any concerns regarding their safety with the prison system and the Youth Justice Board.

Turning to the Chair's question regarding the Triage programme, Anita Dickinson explained that there were many impacts of having a criminal record that could cause difficulties for a young person and which could act to limit their life opportunities. Therefore, in cases relating to low level crime and where the young person had expressed remorse, the police could choose to make a referral to the Triage programme. Following an assessment by the YOT, the police could be requested to take no further action and a plan would be developed to support the young person. This programme had been sustained in a reduced form following budget and funding reductions. With reference to the riots of 2011, Anita Dickinson noted that there had been very few Brent young people involved.

RESOLVED: - that the report be noted.

7. Complex Families Review

Joanna McCormick (Partnerships Co-ordinator) and Fiona Ledden (Director of Legal and Procurement) delivered a presentation to the committee on the Complex Families Project. This project was being developed by the council and partner agencies and aimed to pilot multi-agency early intervention with a cohort of families in the borough. The project would have one management structure, which would facilitate better joint working. Intervention would be co-ordinated via key workers and with reference to individual family plans which would be developed in collaboration with families. Key workers would be required to have specialist knowledge in certain areas which would ensure that there would be a range of knowledge and experience available within the team. This model would bring the necessary professionals around the individual and families as and when needed and would reduce duplication of work.

Fiona Ledden explained that she was sponsoring this project, which entailed providing support to the project in its progress through the one-council programme. This project reflected the amalgamation of several key initiatives being driven forward by central government. It was intended that the positive results of the project would be evident through a reduced impact on the criminal justice system and social care services.

Joanna McCormick further explained that an analysis of child poverty in Brent had indicated that 34.1% of families struggle to meet the basic necessities of life. Parents were disadvantaged by various factors including employability, child care costs and house prices. Changes to benefit entitlement would further disadvantage certain families; in particular lone parents and families with two or more children were at greater risk of this. Central government had estimated that over 1000 families would lose an average of £83 per week in Brent and a further 8,000 would experience reductions just from the cap on Housing Benefit. The project would work with families as a whole and aimed to tackle poverty not 'troubled families'.

Challenges for the project included the national economic context, unemployment and the effective coordination of different central government department initiatives.

Several queries were raised by members in the subsequent discussion. The Chair sought details of how families were identified for this project and Councillor Matthews queried how hard to reach families would be engaged. The Chair and Ms J Cooper (Observer) also sought details regarding the funding arrangements for the project. Councillor Matthews further queried whether support via the project was maintained in the longer term.

In response to members' questions, Joanna McCormick advised that a risk based assessment would be conducted following the receipt of a referral which could be made by a range of services. 150 families were being identified so far with central government seeking a larger number of families to be supported by each authority through its troubled families programme over the next 3 years. Criteria had been established which set the parameters for the cohort of families with whom the project aimed to engage and attempts would be made to identify hard to reach families that might meet this criteria.

With regard to funding and resources, Joanna McCormick advised that existing resources from the council and from across partner agencies would be redirected to support the project's new way of providing multi-agency input to families. In addition, discussions were on-going with central government to clarify its funding approach of payment by results. This approach envisaged the setting of targets and where those targets were met the provision of funds by central government. If targets were exceeded, additional funds would be provided. The means by which results were to be measured was yet to be agreed. The council was particularly interested in measures relating to employment, education, health, deprivation and whether children were subject to Child Protection Plans. Within the current pilot project, work had been conducted with families over the period of a year but final details would be clarified in discussions with central government. Similar pilot projects elsewhere had set timeframes of between 9 and 18 months and had achieved a cost avoidance per family of between £15k and £18k.

Ms Elsie Points enquired whether services offered by voluntary agencies would be included within the multi-agency approach offered by the project. Joanna McCormick confirmed that work was taking place with voluntary agencies such as Addaction and it was intended that this would be expanded.

Councillor Cheese commented on the difficulties faced by lone parent families and particularly noted the barriers to employment and the significance of the impact of the changes to benefit entitlement. Joanna McCormick advised that child care costs were also a significant challenge for lone parent's seeking employment. Councillor Cheese noted that he had presented his concerns to the Children and Families minister regarding the adverse impact that rent capping would have on children, which through families being forced to move out of certain areas would include disruption to children's education.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the report be noted

- (ii) That an update on the project be presented to a future meeting of the committee.

8. Special Educational Needs - Additional Resourced Schools

Rik Boxer presented a report to the committee focusing on the provision of school places for young people with high level special educational needs (SEN). Whilst the majority of children with SEN had their needs met within mainstream schools, those with severe and complex needs would have a Statement of SEN drawn up which would set out the special provision required to meet their needs; this might include a specialist placement. Due to factors such as a rising population, the numbers of children requiring SEN statements had increased over the previous 5 years, in contrast to the national trend which had fallen over the same period. As a result of this trend there was a substantial budgetary deficit within the Dedicated Schools Budget which affected the total funds available for schools in Brent. Rik Boxer explained that the report provided to the committee set out what actions were proposed to address this issue.

Rik Boxer advised that a SEN transformation programme was being driven via the One Council Programme Management Board. The aim of the programme was to maintain and improve outcomes for SEN whilst reducing the associated costs and eliminating the dedicated schools budget deficit over a 3 year period. The council was working closely with the Schools' Forum and with schools direct to achieve this aim. All aspects of the council's SEN policy and procedures were being reviewed and a strategy was being developed. All parties would be consulted and the draft strategy document would be issued by March 2012.

Rik Boxer advised that there were several strands to the SEN transformation programme including school expansion projects to increase local specialist provision. It was noted that the single largest factor in overall SEN costs resulted from placing Brent students in day placements outside of the borough and therefore the school expansion projects were a highly significant aspect of the programme. Members' attention was drawn to paragraphs 5.2 and 5.7 of the report which set out several school expansion projects including the development of new co-located provision for secondary aged students with severe learning difficulties via the rebuild of the Village School by September 2013 and the opening of a satellite centre at Queens Park School in September 2011; expanded specialist nursery provision at Granville Plus Children's Centre; planned development of Vernon House Special school to provide 30 places for pupils with autism; and the intention to establish a 20 place Additionally Resourced Provision at Alperton community School, for which agreement in principle had been obtained.

The committee raised several issues in the subsequent discussion. The Chair queried how the school expansion projects were financed. Ms J Cooper queried whether the knowledge and experience of SEN teachers and Head teachers had been made use of by the One Council programme. Ms J Cooper further noted that many of the school expansion projects related to provision for primary aged pupils and queried whether the subsequent demand on secondary places had been addressed. Ms J Cooper also raised a concern regarding the intention to drive down costs of SEN transport, noting that continuity in staff was beneficial to maintaining a good quality service. Ms Elsie Points noted the introduction of the

'Individual Pupil Support Agreement' (IPSA) as an alternative in certain circumstances to the statutory SEN assessment process and expressed concern that this would result in the needs of some pupils not being fully recognised or met. Councillor Cheese queried whether there were many SEN places filled by pupils from outside of the borough.

In response to members' queries, Rik Boxer explained that the provision of local SEN placements removed the cumulative budgetary pressure of those that it was replacing out of the borough. The capital costs of expansion were not always considerable, particularly where existing facilities were adapted. Where the associated costs of expansion were significant the council had an agreement in principle with the Schools' Forum that the cost of borrowing the required funds would be charged to the dedicated schools budget. Rik Boxer emphasised that there was a focus within the SEN transformation programme, on working closely with the Schools' Forum and direct with Brent's schools. The programme, however, drew resources from across the council services.

Turning to the subject of the development of adequate secondary school places to meet future demand, Rik Boxer confirmed that this had been considered within the long term strategy for SEN provision. A detailed piece of work had been completed regarding demand for SEN places in the longer term and it had been projected that a further 200 specialist places would be required by 2020. These places would be required across all phases and the current expansions were part of a longer term strategy.

Addressing some of the specific concerns expressed by the committee, Rik Boxer advised that the focus of the strategy with regard to the SEN transport service was to achieve cost reduction by increasing the availability of local placements, thereby reducing the length of journeys required. With regard to the introduction of the 'Individual Pupil Support Agreement' (IPSA), this was a means of assessing the needs of pupils and securing the required funding to address these needs, without having to engage in the lengthy and costly process of a statutory assessment. There was an emphasis on ensuring that the decision making with regard to the IPSAs was clear, transparent and consistent. Turning to Councillor Cheese's query, Rik Boxer advised that there were approximately 20 pupils in SEN placements in local authority maintained special schools who came from outside of the borough.

RESOLVED: - that the report be noted.

9. School Places Update

Rik Boxer presented a verbal update to the committee regarding school places within Brent. The shortage of primary school places remained an acute problem and was exacerbated by the continued flow of new arrivals to the borough. At present there were 632 primary aged children in Brent without a school place. Whilst there were currently 306 vacancies across Brent's primary schools, these were not necessarily in the required year groups or geographical areas with the highest shortfall of school places. Consultation on new permanent expansion schemes is being undertaken at Barham Primary School, Fryent Primary School and Mitchell Brook Primary School to provide additional primary provision. Temporary bulge classes would be needed from September 2012 and options for

these were currently being reviewed. The government had awarded £25m to the council to contribute towards the capital costs of expanding primary provision.

Rik Boxer informed the committee that the closing date for Reception year applications had been 15 January 2012 and at present 3,717 had been received. In contrast the number of applications received for 2011 had been 3,642 which further evidenced the continued growth in demand for school places.

With reference to the minutes of the previous meeting, Mr Alloysius Frederick noted that Councillor Arnold had indicated that two schools had submitted expressions of interest in becoming all-through schools and sought an update on this. Rik Boxer advised that no decisions had yet been made.

10. Items from the Forward Plan and the Work Programme

The work programme items scheduled for the following meeting were outlined to the committee. The Chair noted that if members' had any ideas for future items for scrutiny they should be forwarded to her or to Priya Mistry (Policy and Performance Officer).

11. Date of next meeting

The committee noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on Thursday 29 March 2012.

12. Any other urgent business

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm

H GLADBAUM
Chair