



MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 29 March 2012 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Gladbaum (Chair), Aden, Al-Ebadi, Cheese, Hossain and Mitchell Murray, and Mr A Frederick, Ms E Points, Mrs H Imame and Dr Levison

Also Present: Councillor Arnold

Apologies were received from: Councillor HM Patel and Ms J Cooper, Mrs L Gouldbourne and Ms C Jolinon

1. Declaration of personal and prejudicial interests

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

Councillor Hossain declared that she was a member of the Brent Adoption Panel and was a governor for Uxendon Manor Primary School.

2. Deputations (if any)

None.

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 2 February 2012

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2 February 2012 were approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments: -

- The list of those present to include Dr J Levison
- Councillor Cheese's name to be corrected within the list of Councillors present.

4. Brent Youth Parliament update

The committee did not consider this item as there were no members of the Brent Youth Parliament present to provide an update.

5. Education Standards in Brent

Faira Ellks (Head of Services to Schools) presented a detailed report to the committee setting out the educational achievement of Brent pupils for the academic year 2010/11. The report outlined educational achievement for Key Stages 1 to 5 and provided comparable data for the previous five years. The report also detailed

achievement by ethnic group and for children in receipt of free school meals (FSM). This latter measure sought to capture the educational achievement of children potentially disadvantaged by deprivation related issues. The services to schools department worked in partnership with Brent's schools to improve the achievement of pupils. Whilst there was always some polarisation of results by school, overall there was a trend of continued improvement in the educational achievement of Brent pupils.

Faira Ellks explained that for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) there had been a steadily improving trend over the previous five years. There were two key performance indicators (PIs) to consider. The first of these PIs was the number of pupils achieving 78 points or more across all the different areas of learning including six or more points in each of personal, social and emotional development, and in communication, language and literacy. For this PI, there had been a 14 percentage point improvement in 2011 from the previous year. The second PI examined the gap between the lowest performing 20% of pupils and the rest. This equality gap had continued to decrease in 2011 and was greater than the national average by only 1 percentage point. This was considered to be a particular achievement in view of the low starting point of many of Brent's children due to issues relating to deprivation or having English as a second language.

Faira Ellks stated that in previous years, attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 (KS1) had been an area of concern. Performance at Level 2+ (the main performance indicator) was in line with national averages in 2011. Faira Ellks highlighted that attainment at Level 2B+ was a key predictor of attainment at Level 4+ at the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2). For 2011 this remained just below the national average; but the gap between Brent and the national average had narrowed.

For KS2, Faira Ellks advised that with regard to achievement at Level 4 and above in English and mathematics, there had been a rising trend at all levels over the previous five years, with the exception of English at Level 5. Turning to the other key measure of success at KS2, Faira Ellks advised that the percentage of pupils in Brent making two levels of progress in English and in mathematics was well above the national average and had remained the same as in 2010.

Faira Ellks explained that the main indicator of success at Key Stage 3 (KS3) was the percentage of children achieving Level 5 or above by age 14. However, as KS3 tests were no longer statutory, schools had greater control over when KS3 assessments took place. As a consequence, many schools had chosen to carry out KS3 assessments at the end of Year 8 when pupils were aged 13. The committee was advised therefore, to treat the comparison of these results with the national average with some caution. The national expectation was that most pupils would achieve Level 5 or Level 6 in English and mathematics by the end of KS3. At present, Brent results at KS3 were slightly below the national average; however, there had been an upward trend in performance at Level 5 + in Brent in both English and mathematics over the previous five year period.

With regard to Key Stage 4 (KS4), Faira Ellks advised that there were three key measures of success: the percentage of pupils achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics; those achieving three levels of progress between KS2 to KS4; and those achieving the English Baccalaureate, which

consisted of GCSE A* to C grades in English, mathematics, two sciences, humanities and a modern foreign language.

Faira Ellks then provided the committee with a summary of the educational attainment of children of different ethnic groups and the FSM cohort. Faira Ellks reported that at all stages Asian pupils were the highest performing ethnic group. The achievement of Somali pupils had remained below that of other ethnic groups but good progress had been made from previous years. In contrast, the achievement of Black Caribbean pupils had remained below the Brent average and the five year trend was static, indicating that further work was required to raise the achievement of pupils of this ethnic group. With regard to the FSM cohort, at KS1 and KS2, the achievement of Brent FSM children was slightly below the average for Brent pupils but had remained higher than the FSM national average. At KS4 the gap between the Brent average and the achievement of Brent FSM was considerably greater than that at KS1 and KS2. There was no data available as yet regarding the national average at KS4 for the FSM cohort. In response to a query, Rik Boxer advised that approximately 25% of children within Brent were in receipt of FSM. It was agreed that comparative data for London regarding the number of pupils in receipt of free school meals be provided to the committee.

In the subsequent discussion, members raised several queries. The Chair noted that achievement in mathematics by Brent pupils was good and that nationally this was an area where achievement was traditionally weak. Councillor Cheese queried whether there was reluctance by professionals to engage in training to improve standards of teaching due to issues such as embarrassment. Councillor Al-Ebadi noted that a recent report had indicated that only very few teachers were dismissed from schools for poor standards of teaching. The Chair queried how many of Brent's 85 schools were rated 'outstanding' and Councillor Mitchell Murray sought details of the geographical distribution of these schools. Councillor Mitchell Murray also noted that traditionally the educational achievement of girls was better than that of boys; however, it appeared that this trend was not as evident in the data presented.

In response to the issues raised, Faira Ellks advised that primary school teachers' knowledge of mathematics tended to be weaker and there was still considerable work required to address this issue. The MaST programme was a specialist teacher programme specifically aimed at improving the teaching of mathematics in primary schools. Alongside accessing such national programmes, the council had a very experienced member of staff, with a professional background in teacher training, who supported headteachers and teachers in developing strategies to improve the teaching of mathematics in Brent schools. Most teachers were eager to engage in professional development and improve their skills; however, head teachers also assumed a key role in monitoring teachers' strengths and weaknesses.

Faira Ellks further explained that the standard of teaching in most Brent schools was deemed to be satisfactory or better; however, further work was required to ensure that all teaching was of good quality. It was expected that most head teachers knew their staff sufficiently to determine whether further support and training could address any issues or whether alternative action was required. Part of the role of the council's link advisers was to support head teachers to take decisive action to address issues of poor performance. Faira Ellks acknowledged

that traditional practice had involved ineffective teachers being informally moved on from particular positions. At present there were 16 schools in Brent ranked by Ofsted as 'outstanding' and there was little evidence of a correlation between locality and school success. Rather it was considered that the quality of the head teacher was the most important determinant of success within a school.

Turning to discuss Councillor Mitchell Murray's query regarding the relative educational achievement of boys and girls, Faira Ellks advised that the data indicated that whilst girls continued to do well and improve, the achievement of boys was catching up to that of girls.

During members' discussion the committee requested that comparative information for educational achievement across London be provided. Faira Ellks advised that there were some indicators for which this would not be possible but that she would endeavour to provide this information. The Chair also requested information on the number of schools offering the subjects for the English Baccalaureate and the number of Brent pupils who go on to further education. The committee further requested that a breakdown of achievement for each key stage by ethnicity be circulated to committee members and that information regarding the measures in place and the activities being undertaken to support the educational attainment of different ethnic groups be provided to the committee.

RESOLVED

- i. That the continuing improvements in education standards and the contribution made by Services to Schools to these outcomes be noted.
- ii. That a breakdown of achievement for each key stage by ethnicity be circulated to committee members
- iii. That the committee's congratulations be conveyed to all head teachers and teaching staff for their continuing dedicated efforts in raising achievement of Brent pupils

6. **School Places update**

Rik Boxer (Assistant Director, Achievement and Inclusion) provided a verbal update to the committee regarding the shortfall of school places. The committee was reminded that the pressure for school places was concentrated in the Primary sector and as of Tuesday 27 March 2012 there were 737 unplaced children of primary school age. At this time there had also been 324 vacancies; however these had been concentrated in year groups 5 and 6 and did not correspond with the demand for places in the lower year groups. There continued to be a steady stream of new arrivals to the borough and this was reflected both in the demand for primary school places across the year groups and the number of applications which continued to be received for Reception year 2012.

Rik Boxer explained that the council was taking a variety of actions to address the borough's shortfall of school places. A new round of temporary expansions of schools via the creation of bulge classes was currently under consideration; however, the number of appropriate schools was becoming increasingly limited as the programme progressed. A further programme of permanent expansions to schools was also underway, with proposals for a second phase to be considered by

the Executive in August 2012. A good settlement had been received by Brent from the government to fund this programme of expansion; however, this sum was not sufficient for the entirety of the programme. The council would continue to lobby central government, both as part of the wider London lobby and specifically for Brent.

Rik Boxer concluded by noting that the pressure for school places would progress to affect secondary schools and a strategy to meet this demand was being developed.

RESOLVED: - that the verbal update be noted.

7. Inspection on Adoption Services in Brent

Graham Genoni (Assistant Director Children's Social Care) presented a report to the committee, updating members' on the outcome of the Ofsted Adoption Inspection which took place between 13 and 17 February 2012.

Graham Genoni noted that there had been considerable national focus on Adoption services in recent months and the Coalition government had emphasised its commitment to improving these services. The government had expressed several specific concerns including that children were not placed quickly enough, ethnic minority children waited longer to be adopted, prospective adopters were not approved quickly enough and the number of children adopted nationally was decreasing. In response to these concerns, Graham Genoni noted that children with complex needs might wait a long time before they were adopted and that lengthy court proceedings often contributed to the delay experienced by some children. Furthermore, the depth of the assessments conducted with respect to prospective adopters was deemed appropriate. The decreasing number of adoptions coincided with an increasing use of Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) which offered an alternative form of permanency for child. Under an SGO the rights of the birthparents were not completely removed and this could often be desirable for older children.

Graham Genoni advised that the full inspection report was provided at Appendix A. An overall quality rating of 'satisfactory' had been achieved, with three areas receiving a 'good' rating and the remaining two areas a 'satisfactory' rating. Four recommendations had been made within the inspection judgement and these were set out at paragraph 4.7 of the report. The action plan developed in response to these recommendations was included at Appendix 2 to the report. The inspection report had been positive overall and in particular had noted the borough's active approach to recruiting prospective adopters from a range of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, reflecting Brent's diverse community; the successful placement of most children within the twelve month timescale; and, that there had only been one adoption placement breakdown in the last three years. The local authority had been deemed to have good involvement with birthparents and to offer good support and training to prospective adopters. In addition, the inspectors had been impressed with the Adoption and Permanency Panel and with the support offered by the Children and Adolescence Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

During the members discussion several queries were raised by the committee. The Chair queried how many children were currently waiting to be adopted and how

many Brent approved adopters were currently waiting to be matched. The Chair also sought confirmation that the process was compliant with the Equality Act. Councillor Al-Ebadi queried what level of input a child's birthparents would have in deciding the nature of an adoptive placement. Alloysius Frederick queried whether under an SGO a child could choose to have contact with his or her birthparents in the future.

In response to members' queries, Graham Genoni explained that at present there were approximately 15 children waiting to be adopted and the average time it took to place a child in Brent for adoption was 7 months. In placing a child, the department worked hard to ensure an appropriate balance was achieved between minimising delay for a child and ensuring that the most suitable match was identified. The costs of placing a child with an adoptive family approved by another local authority varied between £2,000 and £5,000 and if a child was placed with prospective adopters from a national adoption agency these costs could increase to around £30,000. Prospective adopters which had been approved by Brent were therefore considered prior to external adopters. The council had previously developed a strategy of assessing prospective adopters with a view to 'selling' them to other adoption agencies for similar fees to those charged by other local authorities. Graham Genoni advised that he would provide details of the number of in-house adopters to the committee but noted that the pool of adopters was kept at a reasonable size. The process of assessing adopters was fully compliant with the Equality Act and the department had established active links with gay and lesbian community groups. The views of the birthparents on the type of adoptive placement that they would like for their child were sought and considered by social workers within the process of family finding; however, the needs of the child were paramount and for example, the department would not exclude gay and lesbian prospective adopters from consideration due to a birthparents stated objection. Children placed for adoption or under an SGO on reaching adulthood would be free to have contact with their birthparents if they chose and the department would provide lots of support in these circumstances.

RESOLVED: -

- i. That the outcome of the Adoption inspection report for Brent be noted.
- ii. That the committee's endorsement of the Action Plan be noted
- iii. That the committee's wish of the department's continued success in improving the service be noted.

8. Safeguarding & Looked After Children (LAC) Action Plan update

A report was presented to the committee by Graham Genoni (Assistant Director Children's Social Services) updating members on the outcome of the Safeguarding and Looked After Children (LAC) Inspection and the development of the subsequent action plan. The inspection had taken place between 3 and 14 October 2011 and had been conducted by Ofsted. Brent had achieved 'adequate' ratings for both Safeguarding and Looked After Children (LAC).

Graham Genoni explained that the action plan had been developed to provide a comprehensive response to the inspection outcome and addressed issues raised within the text of the report as well as those formally highlighted as

recommendations. The action plan also included those recommendations for which responsibility was shared with partner agencies and organisations. The council's action plan was complimented by the Children and Families Plan and had been prepared in conjunction with the Health Action Plan which had been developed by Brent Primary Care Trust. It was noted that an 'inadequate' rating had been awarded to health for LAC; robust discussions had been held with NHS Brent and it was currently addressing the issues raised. NHS Brent was reporting its progress in this area both to its inspection body (Care Quality Commission) and to the Council. The Plan included a focus on trying to develop early help teams which would support families before intervention was required by social services. This stream of work would link in with government initiatives around the complex families agenda.

Graham Genoni advised that the Action Plan had benefited from input and quality assurance from London Safeguarding Advisors and the Local Government Improvement and Development Agency (LGIDA), and would be implemented alongside individual service improvement plans already in development. Funding to meet the £152,000 required for the implementation of the plan was expected to be able to be drawn from existing resources via a process of restructure. The monitoring arrangements for the action plan were set out in the report at paragraph 3.9 and included regular monitoring by the Director of Children's Services, the Corporate Management Team, Local Safeguarding Board, Brent Children's Partnership Board and the Lead member for Children and Families. The Department would also seek external challenge of the progress against the plan in June 2012 via the LGIDA and in December 2012 by arranging a process of peer challenge or review.

During members' discussion, the Chair noted that the number of Brent foster carers had increased over the last two years. Graham Genoni advised that the increase from 81 to 105 Brent foster carers had also precipitated an associated decrease in the number of more costly placements with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). It was emphasised however, that a child would not be moved from a settled placement. The Chair also noted that the action plan proposed the creation of three additional posts and queried whether funding for these had been identified. Graham Genoni explained that funding for the posts would be identified from within the departmental budget. In response to requests for further information from the Chair and Councillor Mitchell Murray, Graham Genoni advised that he would forward details to the committee of the number of LAC who proceeded to university and would provide a breakdown by ethnicity and gender of the number of Brent LAC placed outside of the borough.

RESOLVED: -

- i. That the outcome of the Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection report for Brent be noted
- ii. That the Action Plan addressing the recommendations identified in the inspection report be noted.
- iii. That the committee's wish of the department's continued success in improving the service be noted.

9. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

The Chair noted that the current meeting of the committee was the last of the 2011-12 municipal year and advised that the committee's Work Programme was included within the agenda for members' information. In reviewing the work programme, the Chair welcomed the committee's suggestions for issues to be considered for the forthcoming municipal year. In the subsequent discussion the agreed that the following reports should be added to the work programme: -

- An update report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Preventing Youth Offending Task Group.
- An update report relating to Domestic Violence
- A report on the practical implementation of the Complex Families initiative. Councillor Mary Arnold advised that this was scheduled to be included within the One Council Programme.
- A report updating members on the Youth Services. Councillor Mary Arnold that this had also been included as part of a one council project which aimed to bring together lots of services, including leisure services, across a range of providers to support youth engagement

A copy of the Executive Forward Plan was circulated to members of the committee. The Chair advised members to forward any suggestions for the committee's work programme to her or to Priya Mistry (Policy and Performance Officer)

10. Date of next meeting

The committee noted that the date of the next meeting would be confirmed at the Annual Council meeting scheduled for 16 May 2012.

11. Any other urgent business

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm

H GLADBAUM
Chair