

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE
Thursday, 11th January 2007 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Motley (Chair), Councillor Arnold (Vice-Chair, Part) and Councillors Ahmed, Eniola, Mrs Fernandes, Mistry, Tullett (Part), and co-opted members Dr Levison and Mr Lorenzato. The following observers were also present: Mr Vaughan, Mrs L Gouldbourne and Dr Gill Reed (for Ms J Cooper).

Also Present: Cllr Wharton (Lead Member for Children & Families).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C J Patel. There were apologies for lateness from Councillor Arnold.

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

There were none.

2. Minutes of the last Children and Families Scrutiny Panel meetings:

Thursday, 9th November 2006

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel held on 9th November 2006 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

Thursday 22nd November 2006

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel held on 22nd November 2006 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

Thursday, 9th November 2006

Noting comments about the Integrated Service pilots, Tony Vaughan asked whether schools would be expected to contribute towards the cost of this provision. It was clarified that the intention was to continue to roll out the programme for a further year under the current terms. However Krutika Pau (Assistant Director, Children & Families) explained that discussions were continuing about how the scheme would progress after that.

Referring to the Item 'Looked After Children in Brent' the Chair informed the Committee that there would be an update on looked after children at the meeting in April and this would include reference to the measurement of educational outcomes and the assessment of progress for looked after children with a "value added" approach.

4. **Review of Brent Children's and Young Peoples Plan including the Joint Area Review Action Plan**

The Committee had before them a report providing a review of Brent's first Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP). The plan was a strategic document setting out the vision and priorities for the delivery of services to children and young people in Brent. Krutika Pau presented the report and began by highlighting the relationship between the Joint Area Review (JAR) and the CYPP. It was explained that the JAR inspection of Children's services in Brent took place in December 2005. Copies of the report on this, which had previously gone to the Executive, were made available to the Committee. Krutika Pau highlighted that the outcomes from the inspection were good. Arising from the inspection specific recommendations were made and to address these an action plan was developed. It was noted that the recommendations and the Action Plan were attached as Appendices 1 & 2 of the Executive report. Krutika Pau explained that the JAR inspectors report was completed around the same time that the CYPP was being developed. For this reason the Department had been able to incorporate the recommendations from the JAR whilst developing the CYPP. The Committee noted that the CYPP was published in April 2006 and the report before the Committee provided a review of it.

Krutika Pau informed the Committee that the CYPP was monitored by the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board. Various different agencies were represented on this Board such as schools, the voluntary sector, Brent Primary Care Trust (PCT), the Mental Health Trust, the Police, the college and the Probation Service. The Strategic Partnership Board had a common vision and commonly agreed priorities. Resulting from these a three year plan was developed and was consequently approved by both the Board and the Council. This three year plan (2006/9) would be reviewed annually.

It was noted that six priority areas had been determined in the Children & Young People's Plan. Krutika Pau outlined each of the priorities and the objectives arising from them as listed in the Appendix to the report. Following this the Committee were asked to note the key structures, processes and delivery mechanisms, i.e. the building blocks for addressing the six priority areas.

With regard to the 'Key Structures', it was highlighted that a Chair had been appointed for the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. In relation to the 'Key Processes' it was explained that to support children and young

people's participation a Youth Parliament was being established. The Committee were informed that there had been several developments with respect to the 'Key Delivery Mechanisms'. It was highlighted that five Children's centres had been opened and seven more were planned as part of the second phase of the programme. The Chair added that there would be more information about this at the next meeting in March. It was also highlighted that as regards Extended Services local workshops had been organised. These had facilitated greater partnership working and it was noted that there had been good levels of engagement.

There followed questions from the Committee. Tony Vaughan asked whether the Council had a commitment to raising funding for schools. In response Councillor Wharton (Lead Member for Children & Families) explained that the funding for schools from Central Government would be increasing by 7% in the coming year. It was also explained that the Council was facing difficult financial circumstances and for this reason an increase in Council funding could not be guaranteed. The Chair emphasised that in challenging financial situations it was important to prioritise the services affecting vulnerable people.

Lesley Gouldbourne asked why there was no representation from the Teachers Union on the Strategic Partnership Board. Krutika Pau explained that the Director for Children & Families had previously taken a request for such representation to the Board. However the Board made a decision to not have Teachers Union representation. In response to further questions Krutika Pau agreed to look into the reasons why the Strategic Partnership Board had refused this request. However she also explained that headteachers from different sectors were on the Board therefore the teaching profession was represented. Ms Gouldbourne expressed the view that whilst headteachers were on the Board they would not necessarily be able to reflect the views of other teachers¹. It was also suggested that the Strategic Board already had a large membership thus it would be difficult to add to it.

There was discussion about the CYPP's priorities and objectives and the timescales for meeting them. The Assistant Director explained that a performance management document was produced and was considered by the performance management group at their monthly meeting. The document operated a traffic light system against its objectives to show the urgency with which certain targets needed to be met. A member of the Committee suggested that it would be useful for the Committee to receive for information a summary of outcomes measured against the level of resource invested. It was also asked which particular areas within the six priorities currently needed to be focussed on. Krutika Pau explained that areas of particular importance were related to social care and the outcomes for looked after children, the achievement of African Caribbean and Black African children (on a broad spectrum, not just educationally),

¹ As amended at the meeting of the Children & Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 1st March 2007.

and school places. Janet Palmer (Assistant Director, Children & Families) explained that the Department had recently embarked upon a major project to improve services for looked after children. It was also noted that the placements issue was a key priority for the Department.

RESOLVED: -

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that the Department should be congratulated for the good outcome from the Joint Area Review inspection and thanked for its achievement against the Children and Young People's Plan so far ;
- (iii) that the Committee would receive a report in March on developments with Children's Centres and the delivery of preventative services (as mentioned under section 3.14 and 3.15 of the report). The Committee would also be scheduled to consider a report on Extended Services (mentioned in section 3.16) at its meeting in April.

5. Youth Service Update

Elizabeth Rand Greaves (Head of Youth Service, Children & Families) presented this report which provided the Committee with an update on progress made by the Youth Service since the re-inspection carried out by the Office of Standards in Education (OFSTED) in December 2005.

During her discussion of the report Elizabeth Rand-Greaves highlighted several areas in which the service had made improvements. For example, to improve on the accuracy of management information the electronic youth service system was the only system being used to record data. This had resulted in more accurate data being produced. Also, in order to raise the standards of youth work more youth clubs were using a youth service curriculum. The Committee was informed that the most up to date figure for the number of young people reached by the Service was 4,100. Elizabeth Rand-Greaves highlighted that there was an upward trend. However it was noted that it had been more difficult to achieve national targets for accredited outcomes. This was possibly because young people had to opt to take part in schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award. The Committee were asked to note that the number of Asian young people using the service had increased, this area had been highlighted for improvement by the inspection. The Head of Youth Services provided more up to date figures about the number of disabled young people using the service, this had increased from 143 in 2005/6 to 206 in 2006/7.

Elizabeth Rand-Greaves referred the Committee to Appendix 1 which outlined expenditure. It was highlighted that a Quality Assurance and

curriculum officer was now in post. In addition a number of part time staff had been recruited. It was noted that support was being provided to staff to help them gain qualifications. In response to a question from the Chair it was clarified that there was no statutory requirement for youth workers to have a youth work qualification.

The Chair asked for more information about comments that a lack of challenge by workers contributed to a third of sessions being judged as unsatisfactory. The Head of Youth Service explained that to improve sessions and help youth workers raise the aspirations of young people, youth workers were being trained on programme planning. Youth workers would be expected to develop an action plan and their programmes would be inspected and feedback provided. It was also noted that feedback from young people on how to improve programmes would be taken into account. Elizabeth Rand-Greaves also suggested that appointing a Youth Arts Co-ordinator would be of great benefit to the service and this was suggested as a possibility for the next financial year should there be sufficient resource. The Chair agreed, noting that he felt this was an important area of work.

Dr Levison (Co-opted member) asked whether most youth schemes were fully subscribed. The Head of Youth Service explained that some of the Summer University courses in particular were very popular, for example the dance classes were oversubscribed.

There followed discussion about funding. On the suggestion of applying for lottery funding it was clarified that the Council could only do so in association with another organisation. It was noted that the possibility of working with the Sports Council to apply for lottery funding was being looked into. Councillor Arnold advised the Committee that Brent was earmarked as a priority Council for the Young Roots Heritage Lottery Fund, and suggested that the Youth Service should further investigate making a funding application.

In response to further questions about youth engagement Elizabeth Rand-Greaves explained that the target for 2006/7 was to reach 20% of the 13-19 population instead of 25% which was the national target. It was explained that this was felt to be a more realistic target, however it was noted that there continued to be a yearly upward trend. The Head of Youth Service suggested that to reach more of the youth population the service would need to be able to recruit more staff in order to run more sessions.

Councillor Arnold asked for a breakdown of services across the borough and the capital available to spend on new centres. Elizabeth Rand-Greaves explained that a new building would be costly. With regard to using existing buildings it was noted that the Service was in negotiation with Preston Manor High School for use of the school building for the Summer University courses. The Committee were also informed that outreach work was used to access young people in parts of the borough

where there were limited facilities. This included areas such as Queensbury and Kingsbury, North Kilburn, Crest Road, Welsh Harp and Neasden. It was further noted that through outreach work young people in these areas were being encouraged to access youth services organised by the voluntary sector. It was suggested that the Youth Service should monitor the areas where there was little or no provision for young people. Councillor Arnold also suggested this as a possible area for a task group in the future. In relation to this Councillor Mistry suggested that there could be scope for furthering services in the north of the borough by developing a project associated with the Council's involvement with preparations for the Olympics. Krutika Pau agreed and informed the Committee that both herself and Elizabeth Rand Greaves were on the 2012 Steering Group and they were looking creatively at ways to access funding streams that could also help meet the needs of the borough.

Councillor Mrs Fernandes congratulated the Youth Service for its achievement. She asked for further details on how the Service was able to promote participation from a greater number of Asian young people and disabled young people. In response it was explained that to reach Asian young people the Service worked closely with schools and hosted a series of workshops. Through partnership with the schools they were able to provide programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The Service also looked into the factors preventing Asian young people from accessing the youth services. Through investigation it had become clear that there were issues around safety, and the accessibility of some of the centres. It had also been noted that there were issues around session times. Once it had been discovered that earlier after school sessions were preferred by this group, more sessions were provided between 3.30pm and 6.30pm. To promote engagement with a greater number of disabled young people, transport and staffing issues were addressed to make the service more accessible. In addition a list of disabled young people who were known to schools and social services was obtained and this was used to reach out to them.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that the Youth Service be thanked for the considerable improvements made since the re-inspection whilst acknowledging that there was still more work to do.

6. Improving Outcomes for African Caribbean and Black African Pupils – Task Group Update

A Task Group was established by the Committee at their meeting on the 9th November 2006 with a view to addressing some of the issues affecting the outcomes for African Caribbean and Black African Pupils. The

Committee were provided with an update on the progress of the Task Group since it was established.

Councillor Mary Arnold explained that the task group met for the first time on the 13th December 2006 and that she had been appointed as Chair. At their meeting there was a presentation from Mark Ainsworth, project consultant, following which the task group determined that it would seek to achieve three outcomes. The Committee were provided with details on each of these.

The first outcome was to identify and review gaps in the existing action plan. It was explained that this would involve speaking with parents and community groups to get their views and holding a roundtable discussion with relevant stakeholders.

The next outcome would be to identify and disseminate good practice. Councillor Arnold explained that the task group were aware of good initiatives both nationally and in Brent and had identified the importance of disseminating good practice and seeking to provide a central point for all information. It was added that the task group sought to build on existing good practice and not duplicate it.

The final outcome related to embedding the work within existing council policies. To achieve this it would be discussed how this work could be linked to Local Area Agreements. The task group would also be speaking to Brent Councillors about their involvement in this work and seeing how they could become further involved. It would also include looking at how to raise awareness and see how the project could be embedded across relevant council departments.

With regard to timescales Councillor Arnold suggested that a report could be produced before the end of the municipal year. The Chair suggested that this could be ambitious considering the scope of the work. However it was noted that task groups generally ran for a period of six months, Councillor Wharton also advised that it would be beneficial to report back on it within this time. Councillor Tullett explained that the task group hoped to report back on some of the wider issues initially and identify more specific problems consequently. Acknowledging this, the Chair suggested that the task group update the Committee on their progress at each meeting.

RESOLVED: -

- (i) that the update be noted and the task group be thanked for their work so far;
- (ii) that the task group report back to the Committee on their progress at each future meeting.

7. **Date of Next Meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the next meeting of the Children & Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee take place on Thursday, 1st March 2007.

8. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm

W MOTLEY
Chair