

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Wednesday 18th June 2008 at 7.30pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Motley (Chair), Councillor Mrs Fernandes (Vice Chair) and Councillors Arnold, Eniola, Mistry and J Moher and co-opted members Mr Akisanya, Mrs Bondzi-Simpson and Mr Lorenzato.

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families) and Mrs L Gouldbourne, Ms Chris Jolinon and Mr Hank Roberts (for Ms J Cooper) also attended the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C J Patel, Dr Levison (Non-Voting co-opted member) and Ms J Cooper (Teachers' Panel).

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interest

There were none.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12th February 2008 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

Matters Arising – Youth Offending Service

Regarding the Targeted Youth Support plan, the Chair confirmed that this plan would be looked at by the Committee in due course.

Annual Education Standards 2006/07

The Chair explained that he had written a letter on behalf of the Committee to congratulate teachers in the Borough for the educational progress made and thanking them for their hard work. Lesley Gouldbourne (Teachers' Panel) thanked the Chair for this, noting that the letter sent in the previous year had been well received.

Future Agenda Items

The Committee was informed that a report on Youth Provision in Kilburn would be considered at a future meeting.

4. Change to Order of Business

Noting the similarity in content of two items on the agenda, the Chair

suggested that the order of business be re-arranged so that Item 8 "School Places Update" should follow Item 6 "Equalities Impact of School Places Provision in the South of the Borough".

5. Annual Report of Brent Youth Parliament

Manveen Patwalia (Principal Youth Participation Manager) presented this report that outlined the achievements of the Youth Parliament in this, its first year of operation. It was explained that the Youth Parliament was established in March 2007. Since then it had met every month with up to forty seven young people attending its meetings. Ms Patwalia further explained that representatives from the Council, the Primary Care Trust and the Police had also attended meetings to discuss issues affecting young people.

The Principal Youth Participation Manager continued by drawing members attention to some of the changes the Youth Parliament had made. It was noted that in direct response to concerns raised about young people's safety when travelling on buses after school, there was now an increased number of patrol officers on certain bus routes. It was also noted that in reflection of young people's interest in easier and cheaper access to sporting facilities, Vale Farm Leisure Centre was offering free taster sessions to encourage young people to use its facilities. The Committee also heard that members of the Youth parliament had been active in raising its profile by attending various events. With regard to the future, Manveen Patwalia explained that there were plans to encourage more widespread involvement through establishing locality forums.

Manveen Patwalia introduced the Committee to two members of the Youth Parliament present to discuss their achievements over the past year. Moses Howe (Youth Parliament member) explained to the Committee that he was 14 years old and that he had been a member since the start of the Youth Parliament. He noted that through the Youth Parliament he had taken an active interest in online safety and was a member of an e-safety sub group. He also informed the Committee that he had designed the Youth Parliament's website. James Harris (Youth Parliament member) followed and he informed the Committee that he was 13 years old and a pupil of Queens Park Community School. The Committee heard that the Youth Parliament had provided James with the opportunity to meet local Members of Parliament and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Quintain. With regard to the latter, James explained that he had interviewed the Quintain CEO and this had been recorded and shown at various conferences. James informed the Committee that he enjoyed making a contribution through sharing ideas. However he suggested that attendance at meetings could be more consistent.

The Chair asked whether there were any guidelines around attendance. Manveen Patwalia explained that as this was the first year of operation there were no sanctions for poor attendance, however there would be stricter rules for the second year.

Lesley Gouldbourne (Teachers' Panel) congratulated the Youth Parliament on their achievements and commended the young people who had attended to represent the Youth Parliament. Lesley Gouldbourne asked about ideas for reaching out into the community to encourage involvement and suggested that school councils could be contacted. Manveen Patwalia explained that all of the Youth Parliament members had come from school councils, furthermore over 80% of schools were represented. Manveen Patwalia reiterated that the focus over the next year would be to encourage more widespread involvement.

Several members of the Committee also commended the achievements of the Youth Parliament in its first year and acknowledged the hard work and commitment of the officers involved in its establishment. Some Councillors re-iterated the importance of the Youth Parliament reaching out into all schools. In response to questions on this, Manveen Patwalia explained that 10 of the borough's 60 primary schools were represented in the Youth Parliament and that these had been selected through locality elections. Krutika Pau (Children and Families Assistant Director, Strategy & Partnerships) further commented on engaging Primary school representatives and explained that the Youth Parliament had found practical ways to involve this group. The Principal Youth Participation Manager informed the Committee that she was also looking at ways to ascertain the views of young people who were not part of the Youth Parliament.

Councillor J Moher stressed the importance of working with all schools so that ideas could be shared. In particular he noted the success of a road safety initiative at one primary school that could be used by others. The Chair suggested that this idea could be pursued by a task group that would be looking at safety to and from schools. Krutika Pau also explained that through locality based partnership working, sharing good practice could be achieved.

Councillor Arnold also expressed an interest in seeing how the Youth Parliament would be reaching out to youth centres and youth organisations. Giving the example of the South Kilburn Youth Board, Councillor Arnold suggested that it would be beneficial to have formal links and promote awareness with this and other similar type organisations. Councillor Arnold also asked about how the Youth parliament would assist in making progress with regard to the 'Hear by Right' participatory plan. Acknowledging this, Manveen Patwalia explained that the Youth Parliament had achieved much given the resources available. She also explained the importance of managing young people's expectations and working within capacity. In response to further questions about outreach work, Ms Patwalia informed members that the Youth Parliament website was not yet interactive.

The Chair congratulated the Youth Parliament on a successful first year of operation, noting that it had had a very positive impact and this view was echoed by several members of the Committee.

RESOLVED :

- (i) That the Committee note the report and commend the Youth Parliament for its substantial progress since its inaugural session in March 2007;
- (ii) that Brent Youth Parliaments recommendations as set out in paragraph 3.8 of the report, be noted;
- (iii) that the Committee note that council departments will be encouraged to take account of the priorities chosen by the Youth Parliament every year, within their service planning cycle;
- (iv) that the Committee would promote the 'Hear by Right' youth participation standards developed by the National Youth Agency;
- (v) that the relevant officers be thanked for their hard work and commitment in establishing and supporting Brent Youth Parliament.

6. Facilities Audit for the Delivery of 14-19 Diplomas and Activity Survey

Before members was a report providing an overview of the facilities audit for the delivery of 14-19 diplomas and a survey showing the education and employment activities of school leavers in Brent in the academic year 2006/2007. John Galligan (Strategic Co-ordinator for 14-19 Education and Training) presented the report on the facilities audit. He began by explaining that the audit was carried out in order to assess whether providers were ready to deliver the diplomas. The Committee was informed that 24 providers had been interviewed including secondary schools, youth clubs and work-place learning providers.

John Galligan drew members attention to the three diploma lines for which there were minimal resources and little provider interest, these being 'Environment and Land-based studies', 'Manufacture and Product Design' and 'Public Services'. However it was noted that most other diplomas could be delivered but providers had some concerns regarding the requirement for extra facilities. Acknowledging these concerns, John Galligan expressed the view that it was encouraging to see that providers were taking a collaborative approach to tackling this issue.

The Committee also heard that there were plans for a conference in July to discuss which providers would lead on specific diplomas. The Strategic Co-ordinator for 14-19 Education and Training explained that following this it could be determined the level of resources needed. He raised the issue of potentially having a specialist facility for delivering the diplomas and explained that providers in the borough generally felt that the existing facilities would suffice if resourced appropriately. He re-iterated that all providers had demonstrated a willingness to support the process.

There were questions regarding the progress of preparations for the provision

of diplomas. In response John Galligan explained that he wanted to take a strategic approach to ensure that the Council was ready to deliver all diplomas by 2013. This included making use of small scale pilots. The Chair noted that he endorsed this approach of using small scale pilots to help plan towards the successful delivery of the Diplomas on a larger scale.

In response to questions about collaboration and governance, John Galligan emphasised the importance of having a structured approach. It was noted that there was a 14-19 Steering Group and a 14-19 Implementation Group, these groups addressed the practical elements of delivery and they sat under a Diploma Delivery Board.

Several members emphasised the importance of ensuring that parents be made aware of the opportunities arising from 14-19 Diplomas. It was acknowledged that parents were already receptive to the idea of practical learning as applied courses were already offered in many secondary schools. Krutika Pau (Assistant Director Children and Families) added that through 14-19 Diplomas there would be greater choice for students and informed the Committee that schools had been enthusiastic about delivering the Diplomas.

There followed a presentation of the 2007 Activity Survey which demonstrated trends and patterns in education and employment activities as at 31st October 2007 of Year 11 school leavers in Brent in the academic year 2006/2007.

Angela Chiswell (Head of Connexions and Out of School Learning) discussed the report and highlighted some of the positive trends in Brent. For example it was noted that Brent remained above the London and national averages for the number of young people staying in education. Members' attention was drawn to a table showing destinations by ethnicity. Angela Chiswell highlighted the emerging trend showing an increase in the number of children who were white or of mixed heritage remaining unemployed. The Chair suggested that in the future the Committee could look into the issue of improving outcomes for young people of this background. Referring to the breakdown of statistics Councillor Arnold also suggested that it would be interesting to receive information on education and employment activity of young offenders. The Head of Connexions acknowledged this and informed the Committee that this was a group of young people that was always under scrutiny by the service.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That the Committee note the report; and
- (ii) that the Committee receive further updates in the future on delivery of the 14-19 Diplomas; and
- (iii) that further information on the emerging trend of underachievement among white working class boys be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

7. Equalities Impact of School Places Provision in the South of the Borough

Carmen Coffey (Head of Communications and Student Support) presented this report which explored current school provision within Brent across the north and south of the Borough and the impact current provision had on equalities issues across the Borough.

The Head of Communications and Student Support drew members' attention to growth in population and the effect of this on the demand for school places. The Committee was informed that at least 2300 extra school places were needed in Brent by 2014. It was noted that there were currently plans to expand four schools in the south of the borough and it was possible that two of these schools would become Academies.

Members noted various trends as highlighted in the report. For example it was explained that most primary aged children attended a school less than a mile from where they resided. It was also noted that 3% of pupils living in the north of the Borough travelled more than 3 miles to get to a Brent school whilst 11.8% of pupils living in the south of the Borough traveled more than 3 miles to get to a Brent school. It was also highlighted that historically there had always been a number of Brent children attending schools out of the Borough, whilst equally there were many children from other Borough's attending school in Brent.

On the issue of parental choice, the Committee was advised that the difference in parental preference being met based on residence in either the north or the south of the borough was less than 4%.

Following this, Clive Romain (Senior Education Lawyer, Brent Council) discussed with the Committee any legal concerns arising from the report. He advised the Committee that there were no specific regulations regarding what was to be considered when a Local Authority was in the position of opening or closing a school. However it was explained that the Local Authority did have a general duty under the Race Regulations Act section 71 to "*eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and promote good relations between people of different racial groups*". With regard to the Academy in Wembley Park, Clive Romain expressed the view that it would be right for an equalities impact assessment to be carried out. It was noted that this had been done and was put before the Executive Committee to assist them in making a decision at their meeting in January 2007.

In response to the Chair's question with regard to whether the Council had fulfilled its general duty under the Race Regulations Act, it was explained that there was an argument to suggest that this was the case. It was noted that there had been a full discussion with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). Councillor Wharton added that there had been no response from the Commission following from the last letter sent by the Council in December.

Lesley Gouldbourne (Teachers' Panel) expressed the view that further information could have been provided in the form of ethnic breakdowns for the table showing distances travelled to schools (p.38) and also with regard to parental choice. This could assist in showing whether a particular racial group had to travel longer distances to schools. In response Carmen Coffey explained that this information had been provided in the full assessment that was presented to the EHRC. Hank Roberts (Teachers' Panel) added that with regard to secondary schooling there was less choice in the south. He expressed the view that a school in Wembley would not improve the level of choice in the south. He also noted that when assessing travelling distances, those travelling to schools outside of the borough should be included.

Hank Roberts also noted that before the Committee was correspondence from the Council to the EHRC however the responses from the Commission had not been provided. Hank Roberts added that the national Union for Teachers (NUT) were launching a legal challenge against the Local Authorities decision to build the Wembley Park Academy.

There followed discussion about the admissions arrangements for the Wembley Park Academy. Carmen Coffey explained that the Academy's Oversubscription Criteria would include distance travelled to school. In order to ensure equal access for children in the south of the borough, there would be two points of reference for where distances would be measured towards. One of these would be the main gate of the school, the other would be Fawood Children's Centre on Fawood Road in the south of the borough.

Councillor J Moher expressed the view that it was damaging to the Council for the allegation to be raised that the Council had been disadvantaging pupils of a certain racial background. The Chair proposed the following motion for the resolution to state that:

"In the light of evidence in this report the school places strategy, as outlined here does not have an impact that is racially discriminatory on the south of the borough"

Four members voted in favour and there were four abstentions. Councillors Mistry and Mrs Fernandes requested that their abstentions be noted. They expressed the view that further information could still be provided in the race impact assessment. Mrs Bondzi-Simpson also commented that it would have been beneficial to see information on whether there was any relationship between ethnicity and parental choice.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That the general pressure on school places, population projections which will further increase pressure on places and the Council's plans to provide additional places be noted; and

- (ii) that the extent to which parental preference determines the distance travelled to school be noted; and
- (iii) that the correspondence between the Council and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), which details the Council's plans to increase the provision of school places across the Borough including significant expansion in the south be noted; and
- (iv) that in the light of evidence in the report before the Committee, the school places strategy as outlined does not have an impact that is racially discriminatory on the south of the borough.

8 School Places Update

Carmen Coffey (Head of Communications and Student Support) provided members with a verbal update on the demand for school places. A report with the information provided was also distributed at the meeting. It was highlighted that there had been 3594 applications for reception places and 645 applications for junior school admissions as at 9th June 2008. Carmen Coffey expressed confidence that there would be sufficient places to all those who had applied, especially considering that there were an additional seven forms of entry available as compared to two years ago. On the issue of meeting parental preferences, it was noted that 78% of parents were offered their first choice of primary school.

With regard to secondary applications, it was noted that there had been 3040 applications for Year 7 from Brent residents and 1271 applications from out of borough residents with a total of 4311. It was noted that the majority of schools were oversubscribed and that as of 9th June 2008 there were 133 unplaced secondary pupils. However Carmen Coffey explained that offers would continue to be made up until the 31st August 2008. With regard to parental preferences, it was highlighted that 74% of children had secured their first choice of secondary school.

There followed discussion on casual admissions and the number of children without a secondary school place over the course of the school year. Carmen Coffey informed the Committee that during the past year many children arrived from overseas from countries such as India, Brazil, Somalia, Portugal and Afghanistan. Noting that there were increasing numbers of children from Brazil arriving in Brent, Councillor Arnold highlighted the importance of recognising this group and finding an appropriate way to categorise them on ethnic monitoring forms. Krutika Pau acknowledged this and commented that these groups would be reflected in data collection. Councillor Arnold also noted the importance of other Council services doing the same.

It was noted that there were various projects that the Local Authority had set up in order to provide support to children whilst they were awaiting a school place. These projects included taught programmes of English, maths and science and it was hoped that by attending these projects the children would assimilate more easily into school once a place had been arranged for them.

In response to questions, Carmen Coffey explained that children would generally be in a project for around one term before a place was found for them. However, very few would remain in projects for up to a year. Mrs Bondzi-Simpson commented that it would be useful for the Committee to consider some data on how long children remained in projects for. Similarly, in acknowledging that the projects for children awaiting school places were closely monitored, Councillor Arnold asked whether the Committee could have sight of the monitoring reports.

The Chair commented on the numbers of children without a school place and the number of children in projects awaiting a school place. He expressed the view that it was important for the Council to have a strategy to deal with the recurring issue of increased demand for school places.

There followed discussion on the three schools that had not been performing well according to the league tables. Councillor Wharton explained that Capital City Academy and Cardinal Hinsley had been making year on year improvements. He also explained to the Committee that whilst John Kelly Boys Technology College had below average league table results, it had been noted in an Ofsted report that children at the school made good progress whilst there. The Lead Member for Children and Families also commented on the importance of ensuring that these schools were able to access government funding targeted to helping such schools.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) That the Committee note the report; and
- (ii) that at a future meeting the Committee be provided with more information on the monitoring of projects for children awaiting a place in school.

9 Children & Families Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2008/09

Stella Akintan (Policy and Performance Officer) presented this report setting out the options for the Committee's work programme for 2008/09. The Policy and Performance Officer advised members to consider links between the work of the Committee and the Council's corporate priorities. It was also noted that the topics chosen for discussion by the Committee could reflect public concerns. Members were advised that the Committee could take a broader view on its approach and consider inviting witnesses from outside organisations or by arranging visits to relevant organisations.

Following this, Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families) discussed the Administration's priorities around youth. He advised the Committee that during the budget making process the Executive had identified four broad priorities. These included looking at ways in which the Council could improve routes into work and work experience for young people. Regarding this, Councillor Arnold also noted that the Council had a responsibility in this area as an employer. Other priorities were to improve the

offer of sport to young people, to make young people feel safe and to promote a more positive image of young people. Councillor Wharton also advised that aid to the voluntary sector was being restructured and that every year there would be money available for new groups. It was noted that this year priority would be given to new groups in the field of youth work.

RESOLVED:-

That the 2008/09 Work Programme be agreed.

10 Any Other Business

The Chair reminded Committee members of training event taking place on 21st July 2008 for members involved in Overview and Scrutiny work.

11 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting had been scheduled for Wednesday 10th September 2008.

The meeting ended at 10.10pm

W MOTLEY
Chair