

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 10 September 2008 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Motley (Chair), Councillor Mrs Fernandes (Vice Chair), and Councillors Arnold, Bessong (alternate for C J Patel), Eniola (part), Mistry J Moher, and Tancred, together with co-opted member Mr Lorenzato and observers Ms J Cooper and Mrs L Gouldbourne.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C J Patel, Mr Akisanya (Voting Co-optee), Ms C Jolinon (Teachers' Panel) and Dr Levison (Non-Voting Co-optee).

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families) and Councillor Hashmi.

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 18 June 2008 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

Facilities Audit for the Delivery of 14-19 Diplomas and Activity Survey – Underachievement of White Working-Class Boys

The Chair confirmed that a report would be commissioned for discussion at a future meeting.

Equalities Impact of School Places Provision in the South of the Borough – Legal Challenge against Local Authority Decision to Build Wembley Park Academy

Clive Romain (Senior Education Lawyer, Brent Council) informed the Committee that Wembley Park Action Group had made an unsuccessful legal challenge against the Local Authority's decision to build the Academy. The appeal had also been turned down and the group had no further legal recourse.

The Committee noted that the legal challenge had been mounted by Wembley Park Action Group, and not – as reported in the minutes of the previous meeting – the National Union of Teachers (NUT).

Children & Families Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2008/09 – Restructuring of Aid to Voluntary Sector with Youth Groups as a Priority

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families) informed the Committee that, at its meeting the previous day, the Executive had approved the allocation of more than £100,000 in relation to 13 bids.

4. School Places Update

Carmen Coffey (Head of Communication & Student Support) provided the Committee with a verbal update and answered questions from members on the sufficiency of school places, the number of children currently without a school place, and measures taken to provide suitable provision out of school.

Ms Coffey informed the Committee that at 31 August 2008 a total of 77 Year 7 pupils (11-year olds) were without high school places, having declined offers. There were vacancies in three high schools – John Kelly Boys', John Kelly Girls' and Cardinal Hinsley, but most of the unplaced pupils had applied for oversubscribed schools in the north of the borough, faith schools or schools outside the borough. The authority had approached schools to take pupils over their standard number. Officers had also liaised with neighbouring boroughs to identify schools with vacancies, and informed parents of any vacancies. Three assessment centres had been run to profile pupils and help them find places.

There had been a greater than expected increase in the number of applications to Reception classes (rising five-year-olds). Seven extra Reception classes had been opened, and all were virtually full. In the school year 2007/08 alone a total of 176 Reception-age children had arrived in Brent and been allocated school places as casual admissions. Ms Coffey reported that it might be necessary to open further additional classes. At 10 September 2008 a total of 62 Reception pupils were unplaced, their parents having declined offers.

In addition to the 62 unplaced Reception-age children a total of 106 children of primary school age were out of school on 10 September 2008, with 139 children of secondary school age also out of school on the same day.

Ms Coffey also updated the Committee on the progress of projects and answered questions from members. A review had taken place and would be available for the next meeting of the Committee. As part of the review, meetings had been held with the children involved, and their assessment had been very positive. More details would be in the report to the next meeting of the Committee. In the meantime, Ms Coffey reported progress as follows:

- City Learning Centre attached to Queens Park Community School – currently only six pupils were on roll, with capacity for 35
- Greenway project at Claremont High School – currently 17 on roll, with capacity for 35
- Ashley Gardens – all 20 places were currently free, as children who had been placed there had moved to take up school places

- College of North West London – the previous year’s cohort had completed their studies and most were continuing with further education in the college
- Reduced GCSE courses at Kingsbury High School – the first cohort had achieved very pleasing results.

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted.

5. **Sports Provision Available to Young People in Brent**

Gerry Kiefer (Head of Sports Service) and Mick McDonnell (Adviser for PE and Sport) presented a report and answered questions from members on the provision of sports facilities and opportunities for young people in Brent. Recognising that the Council was just one of many providers, the officers had also included information about sports provision within and outside schools and the significant improvement of school sport in Brent. They emphasised that the Council’s sports service worked together with education, with the main aim of ensuring that 5-16 year-olds did two hours of sport weekly. Currently 83% were doing so. Competitive sport was alive and well in competitions within and between schools, and teams had represented the borough at the London Youth Games.

There were concerns around the provision of swimming, with limits on pool time and the cost of transport. The issue of swimming, the need for a third and possibly a fourth swimming pool, and the location of any new pool were issues of concern to the Committee and it was agreed that they would be looked at in the future.

A total of 29% of users of sports centres were young people, with a good spread of sports halls around the borough. The Council’s desire to support users was demonstrated by capital investment in ball courts/multi-use games areas.

Ms Cooper (Teachers’ Panel) congratulated the officers on the increase in Physical Education (PE) and sport, and suggested that if a new pool was built in the north of the borough, more people could walk to it from schools, thereby reducing the transport costs.

In answer to questions from Councillor Arnold, Mr McDonnell informed the Committee that there had been significant improvements in the level of participation in sport, but schools faced challenges such as pupils not bringing in sports kit and being unwilling to join in, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Outreach work with the Council’s sports service and all other partners was aimed at extending provision, and the new Government target would be five hours of sport weekly for 5-19 year-olds, which would include participation outside the school environment.

In response to suggestions from members about measures to improve early access to cycling and sailing, the officers agreed to cover them in the sports strategy, which was currently being revised and would be discussed by the Committee at a future meeting.

Mrs Gouldbourne (Teachers' Panel) suggested that ARK be approached with a view to ensuring that sports facilities, at least a tennis court, be included in the plans for the new academy and made available to the local community.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the Committee note the report and the improvements in sports provision for young people in Brent;
- (ii) that a further report, focusing on the provision of swimming in the borough, be considered at a future meeting;
- (iii) that the revised sports strategy be discussed at a future meeting.

6. Trends in Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Andy James (Head of Recruitment and Assessment) and Chris Harris (School Workforce Development Adviser) presented a report and answered questions from members on the recruitment and retention of high-quality teaching staff. Mr James drew the Committee's attention to improved success rates in relation to recruiting head teachers, with only one post readvertised. This had been achieved in part through succession planning.

Mr Harris reported that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) was a key part of the teacher retention strategy, with substantial training and development on offer, especially for primary schools. While the key focus was on training and developing leaders, newly-qualified teachers (NQTs) also received substantial support. The aim was now to bolster the element of CPD relevant to teachers between those two stages by means of, for example, a well-being project being undertaken with 25 schools.

A survey of head teachers and deputy head teachers carried out in the previous year had confirmed that teachers liked working in Brent for many reasons, including pay, other incentives, availability of training and the vibrancy of the community.

Asked about the possibility of gaining useful retention information from exit interviews and ethnic monitoring information, Mr Harris informed the Committee that this information was held by schools, and that the authority would be talking to them about gaining access to it. Krutika Pau (Assistant Director, Children and Families) reported that it would be a requirement by 2010 for the authority to hold ethnic monitoring data centrally, and the authority was working towards this.

Mrs Gouldbourne congratulated the officers on their work and reported that teachers valued it. She asked what was being done to support teachers experiencing stress and mental health problems. Mr Harris reported that this was an issue for the schools to deal with, with help from the authority.

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted, in particular the improved recruitment of teachers.

7. Looked After Children

Ros Morris (Head of Commissioning Services) presented a report and answered questions from members on progress of the *Invest to Save* programme and Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets relating to the education of Looked After Children. Ms Morris reported that, while a reduction had been achieved in the number of Looked After Children in 2007/08, on course for the 2010 target of 300, there was also a rising number of complex referrals. A reduction in the amount spent on external placements had been achieved as a result of the reduction in number of Looked After Children, the increasing use of Brent placements, and clearer and more cost-effective commissioning arrangements with external placement providers. Various strategies were in place to prevent children and young people from becoming looked after, and marketing expertise was being used to mount an ambitious recruitment campaign for foster carers and adoptive parents.

Ms Morris reported year on year improvements towards LAA targets relating to the educational attainment of Looked After Children as a result of a proactive series of programmes.

Answering questions from members, Ms Morris informed the Committee that six additional foster carers had been approved so far in the current year, against a target of a minimum of 25. Additional measures had been put in place towards achieving the target and it was now hoped that a minimum of 12 would have been approved by October 2008 and nearer to 30 by the end of March 2009, compared with a total of 14 in 2007/08. The Council was benchmarking its services and support against those provided by independent fostering agencies with a view to increasing recruitment and retention of foster carers. The aim was to have the majority of Looked After Children in Brent cared for by Council services, but a minority would inevitably be better placed by specialist independent agencies.

Asked about the nature and extent of services designed to prevent children from becoming looked after, Ms Morris reported that the two main programmes were the multi-disciplinary Crisis Intervention and Support Team and the Family Group Conference Service, and that risk assessment was continuous with a view to determining the need for intervention.

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted.

8 Interim Task Group Findings on Involving Parents and Faith Groups in Talking to Young People about Sex and Relationships

The Chair presented a report setting out the interim findings of the Committee's task group investigation into involving faith groups and parents in promoting positive messages about sex and relationships among young people. The task group was considering recommendations on the need to:

- develop a co-ordinated approach to engaging with faith communities
- provide information about talking to young people about sex and relationships

- gather statistical data
- provide opportunities for parents to discuss and share ideas about talking to young people about sex and relationships.

Asked whether the task group or the Committee had tried to find out what was already happening in terms of schools' contacts with parents on this issue, the Chair reported that a full audit had not been done. Stella Akintan (Policy and Regeneration Unit) added that there had been an audit of secondary schools, some of which did communicate with parents on these issues.

The task group would be meeting with a representative from Brent Primary Care Trust to discuss joint working on developing co-ordinated messages around sex and relationships, and the task group's final report would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

9 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 26 November 2008. Mr Lorenzato gave apologies for not being able to attend.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm.

W MOTLEY
Chair