

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2009 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Motley (Chair), and Councillors Arnold, Butt (for Eniola), Mistry, J Moher (part), and Tancred, together with co-opted members Mr Lorenzato and Dr Levison and observer Ms Jolinon.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Castle and Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Arnold and Mrs. Fernandes, Mrs. Gouldbourne (Mr H Roberts attended in her place), Ms Cooper, and Rev Phil Stone.

**1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interest**

None declared.

**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 4<sup>th</sup> February 2009 be approved as an accurate record.

**3. Matters Arising**

*Local Area Agreement- priorities for children and young people*

The issue of the annual report on LAA priorities was raised and it was clarified that the committee had requested that the report should be presented in January of each year for consideration in good time before the budget was agreed.

**4. Support for Somali Parents**

Mark Ainsworth (Improving Outcomes Project Consultant) introduced the report which provided an update of the additional support being made available to Somali parents. He informed the committee that the change to the school's funding formula in 2008/09 had provided an impetus to maintain and improve the support being made available to Somali parents. Both this and changes in the OfSTED framework for inspecting schools have encouraged schools to be more concerned with community cohesion and inclusive in community engagement. An increase in the local authority holdback of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant from 2009/10 would also provide the local authority with more influence in promoting parent involvement and raising Somali pupil attainment where progress was slow. He added that schools had

been classified into three types:-

- (i) schools with large Somali student population making good progress;
- (ii) schools with large Somali population where there is a need to encourage parent participation and raise Somali pupil attainment; and
- (iii) schools with a small Somali student population.

In answer to a question, the committee was informed that Somali children accounted for about 8% of the school population, totaling around 3,000.

The Committee described as encouraging existing support programmes in schools, but noted as disappointing the continuing under attainment of Somali students by key stage 4 compared to other heritage groups in Brent. Members stated that further analysis was needed of this under attainment, in addition to a clearer outline of what exactly was provided in the way of support. John Christie (Director of Children and Families) explained that within schools, head teachers identified underperforming children and their parents, after which they were targeted for support which included study support to students and support in English for parents to enhance their communication skills. He acknowledged the increase in the numbers of Somali students and pointed out that funding and provision of support had consequently been increased. Through existing programmes, Brent was engaging with Somali parents but he reminded the committee that this was not the only underachieving group that schools supported.

Harbi Farah (Help Somalia Foundation) stated his dissatisfaction with progress of the support programmes in some schools and added that the Somali community was willing to engage despite in the past having lacked adequate opportunities for engagement.

Naureen Kausar informed the committee that good practices were being spread in schools through encouragement and by targeting and building a relationship with schools with poor performance results. Schools were also being reminded of the new statutory duty to promote community cohesion. It was pointed out that Academies adopted a similar approach to regular schools in parental engagement.

The Chair thanked the presenters for attending the Committee. He stated that this issue involved a relatively high proportion of school children and having heard that there was some dissatisfaction of the level of support offered by some schools the committee should review the situation in the future.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (i) that the positive progress in providing additional support to Somali parents be noted;
- (ii) that the view of the committee that the programme of support to Somali parents should be extended to include more schools and provided at a

more intensive level where needed be conveyed to the Director of Children and Families;

- (iii) that the progress on providing additional support to Somali parents be reported back in one year when the committee hopes to see further significant improvements in the level of support provided.

## 5. **Child Protection Arrangements in Brent**

The Committee considered the report on the operational and strategic child protection arrangements in place in Brent in light of the death of 'Baby P' and the publication of the Ofsted inspection report on safeguarding and child protection in Haringey. Graham Genoni (Assistant Director, Social Care) explained that the new inspection regime would give less notice of inspections than now given with only 2 weeks notice of the big 3 yearly inspections and provided for lightening inspections. He reported that the council had engaged Janice Lloyd, an ex-inspector for child care services, to oversee four key areas of work:

- (i) an updated audit of services in response to Lord Laming's original recommendations,
- (ii) an audit of all child protection cases and related plans, amounting to 190 cases,
- (iii) an audit of the position in Brent measured against the findings of the Haringey Joint Area Review, and
- (iv) an audit of the action plan which arose following Brent's inspection of child protection services in 2003.

Graham Genoni outlined the main findings of the audits. No major cases with weaknesses had been found but areas where some improvement could be made had been identified. Two serious case reviews had also been conducted from which one was found to be satisfactory and the other where areas of weakness that took place 2 years ago had been found but where improvements had already been made. The overall picture was positive, and individual recommendations from the action plan were being examined. One further serious case review had recently been initiated.

Det. Sergeant Neil Fowler (Brent & Harrow Child Abuse Investigation Team) outlined further measures to protect children which he would be discussing with children's services. These were:-

- (i) a review every 28 days of children protection cases including working closely with Brent assessment teams, and
- (ii) a closer working relationship of police and social care with police being given contact details of carers and social workers.

Graham Genoni emphasised the continuing efforts being made to ensure information was shared with the police and other partner agencies and referred to paragraph 3.10 of the report which outlined the establishment of a children and young people's trust arrangement known as Brent Children's

Partnership.

The Chair asked whether the new Locality teams, presented a new layer of bureaucracy, and the committee asked if the new oversight arrangements as outlined in paragraphs 3.10 to 3.13 of the report presented excessive bureaucracy affecting child care arrangements. In response, John Christie explained that the report described the various meetings and bodies that took place that included child care issues as part of their business but that they were not single issue meetings.

In response to a question posed by the Chair as to the extent of the review as outlined in paragraph 3.15 of the report, Mr. Christie stated that as the review was scheduled to begin next week he could not at this stage anticipate the outcome, although it was likely to be a smaller report this year than in previous years because of all the other auditing activity that had already taken place. He added that 12 efficiency and service reviews had already been conducted, aspects of which, relating to child protection, had already been presented to the Committee. The Chair requested that the report be presented to the committee in due course.

Councillor Wharton pointed out that the Chief Executive planned to establish a regular cross party meeting of group leaders and children's portfolio holders to review child protection arrangements. The committee welcomed the greater involvement of members and asked that the Chair of the committee be added to the membership

The Committee asked that the outcome of the Chief Executive's quarterly high level meeting with senior department and agency representatives with responsibility for children and families across the Borough be also made available to the Chair of the Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee. The Committee also asked that the "In Brent" service review of child protection services planned for 2009/10 which had been brought forward to start in March 2009 be presented to Committee.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the findings of the audits undertaken in November and December 2008 to be reported to the Executive, be noted;
- (ii) that the proposals covered in paragraphs 3.14 to 3.19 of the report circulated for strengthening both the operational and strategic oversight of child protection arrangements in Brent be noted;
- (iii) that a report be submitted to the committee in due course on the implementation and impact of the growth in children's social care posts of £1.07m referred to in paragraph 3.9 of the report circulated;
- (iv) that it be requested that the Chair of the Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee be kept informed on the outcome of the quarterly high level meeting implemented by the Chief Executive;

- (v) that it be requested that the “In Brent” service review of child protection services for 2009/10 be presented to the Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee;
- (vi) that the formation of a cross party meeting to review child protection arrangements be fully supported and it be requested that the Chair of the Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee is a member of the meeting.

## **6. Annual Performance Assessment of Services for Children and Young People in Brent**

John Christie (Director of Children Services) presented the report, which had been submitted to the Executive on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2009, to the committee. He informed the committee that the most recent OFSTED assessment had concluded that the Council provided a good service with good capacity for improvement. An action plan based on this assessment had been developed to address the areas of development identified. This included a new social care structure and increased investment of £1 Million into social care to address capacity issues.

Mr. Christie expressed disagreement with OFSTED’s assessment of Brent’s children’s services with regard to staying safe which had been given a score of 2. OFSTED had reported that 5 indicators had fallen, but this was incorrect and although this had been accepted with regard to two of them the score had remained the same. John Christie re-iterated his belief that the self assessment was a fair reflection of the Council’s performance and that overall the council had improved the quality of life for these young people

John Christie explained his view that the decision to combine, in the judgment area, the categories important weaknesses and areas for development was flawed.

A series of tables showing an analysis on progress made by black Caribbean and black Somali pupils was circulated at the meeting. This showed a significant improvement in achievement levels. John Christie stated that it could not be argued that such figures represented a weakness but he acknowledged it remained an area for development. He pointed out OFSTED’s broad classification of Black students as being inappropriate because Black Caribbean students had different needs from Black African students such as from Somalia and therefore needed different strategies.

Graham Genoni (Assistant Director, Social Care) updated the committee on the work underway to address the action plan as it related to being healthy and staying safe.

The Committee asked if it had become more difficult to recruit foster carers and experienced social workers. Members also asked if there was confidence in the new structure and resources directed to safeguarding children. The

Committee was informed that the Council worked very hard to attract additional and experienced foster carers and that the additional resources made available were partly to recruit additional social workers. However it was a very competitive market and there was a limited supply of such labour. Councillor Wharton identified the lack of experienced social workers and the dependence on agency staff as the main challenges to safeguarding children. The Committee was reassured that placement stability was an area that was monitored closely by the Council with regard to putting children with foster carers.

Mr. Christie reported that there had been an increase in child protection work over the past 3 years and since the Baby P case as a result of there being more referrals. There had also been much discussion that the computer based administrative system was detracting from carers spending more time on their prime role of caring. In striving to meet OFSTED expectations, more resources were being put into child protection so that workloads were retained at a manageable level.

Members voted unanimously to endorse the action plan produced to address the areas of development identified by the Annual Performance Assessment.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the outcome of the 2008 Annual Performance Assessment of services for children and young people in Brent and its contribution to the Audit Commission's CAA be noted;
- (ii) that the action plan produced to address areas of development identified by the Annual Performance Assessment process be endorsed.

## 7. **School Nursing**

Sarah Thompson (Director of Provider Services, NHS Brent) and Jo Ohlson (Director of Commissioning NHS Brent) were present at the meeting.

Anita Underwood (Interim Assistant Director, Integrated Health Services NHS Brent) presented the report on the provision of school nurses in Brent. A review of community services in Brent undertaken by the Primary Care Trust in 2008/09 identified school nursing as a priority for development. She stated that because of difficulty in recruiting new nurses, Brent NHS was working with the University of Buckinghamshire to redesign a course for qualifying nurses to undertake to raise the profile of school nurses as a career.

Anita Underwood explained that funding was still to be approved but that a business case for a £220,000 investment in school nursing would be submitted for approval by April 2009. She added that the programme would see an increase in the number of school nurses in the borough. It was proposed that they would be in post by September and follow a two year modular course so that by 2011 they would be fully qualified.

The Committee was pleased to see the re-investment in school nurses after the service had been cut by 40% which had undermined the piloting of an integrated service under the CAFFE framework in which nurses had been an important component. They expressed the hope that new nurses would be sufficient in number to enable a responsive service and not just a reactive one. Ms. Thompson stated that the investment was greater in terms of quality and scope of the new school nursing programme, and every school would have a dedicated nurse, with the aim being to have 19 CAFFE trained school nurses across the Borough developed around 5 localities. Training she reported had already begun and as stated by 2011 the new nurses would be fully qualified. The importance of the immunisation programme was highlighted and it was noted that the rate of MMR immunisations was dropping and that the Overview and Scrutiny Health Select Committee was looking into this.

Addressing a Committee question as to the working relationship between nurses and teachers in schools, Ms. Thompson stated that nurses and teachers had a good rapport, and although in the past confidentiality requirements had hindered communication, a new information sharing programme was being developed.

The chair thanked the presenters for their report and for attending the Committee meeting.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the specification for school nursing be supported;
- (ii) that a short report on the outcome of the submission to the NHS Brent Board of the business case for the school nursing service be submitted to the next meeting of the committee.

## 8. **School Places Verbal Update**

The Chair reminded members that this item was a regular committee update he had requested.

Mr John Christie (Director Children and Families) informed the committee that:

- pressure on school places continued with 103 children aged 4-16 without a school place as of 27<sup>th</sup> February, comprising 62 primary and 41 secondary aged children,
- there were currently 62 OOS primary aged children in the following year groups R (17) , Yr 1 (13), Yr 2 (9), Yr 3 (5), Yr 4 (4), Yr 5 (8), Yr 6 (6),
- the majority of unplaced reception, Yr 1 & 2's were south of the Borough (Harlesden, Willesden), followed by Kingsbury/Kenton and a couple in Wembley. There were still vacancies in Preston Park,

- Kingsbury Green and Wembley Primary School. Most of the reception children were under statutory school age,
- there were 41 secondary aged children without a place in the following year groups Yr 7 (8), Yr 8 (7), Yr 9 (11), Yr 10 (11), Yr 11 (4),
  - there were a significant level of vacancies at John Kelly Boys in Yr 7 and Cardinal Hinsley in all year groups. The other schools were full,
  - there were currently 158 children on role in projects and college courses to meet demand for EAL provision,
  - the number of new arrivals having gone down in January 2009 had risen in February to levels the same as the previous two years,
  - letters for secondary school places for September 2009 were sent on 2nd March 2009, and
  - 69% of Brent children were allocated their first preference.

The Committee asked if the 1<sup>st</sup> preference rate was up from last year, and what the spare capacity recommended for school places was. Mr. Christie stated that he did not yet have the information in respect of 1<sup>st</sup> preference rates, but informed the committee that Brent was below the 5% spare capacity which was recommended for schools by 1%.

In answer to a question about the completion of a traffic survey for the new Wembley Academy, John Christie stated that a traffic assessment had been done and would be submitted as part of the planning application for the Academy.

**RESOLVED:-**

that the position on school places be noted.

**9. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2009.

**10. Work Programme**

The Chair asked that a report on the significant changes in the school funding formula be added to the work programme and that the work programme and decision tracking be submitted to the next meeting of the committee.

The meeting ended at 10:10pm

W. MOTLEY  
Chair