

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

**Wednesday 29 April 2009 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Motley (Chair), Councillor Mrs Fernandes (Vice Chair), and Councillors Arnold, Eniola, Mistry, Singh (for J Moher), and Tancred, together with co-opted members Mr Lorenzato and Mr Akisanya, and observers Ms J Cooper and Mrs L Gouldbourne.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C J Patel and from Ms C Jolinon (Teachers' Panel).

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families) and representatives of Brent Youth Parliament.

The Chair welcomed the representatives of Brent Youth Parliament to the meeting.

**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 5 March 2009 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

**3. Matters Arising**

*Item 4 – Support for Somali Parents*

The Chair reported that the Committee's view on extending support for Somali parents had been conveyed formally to the Director of Children and Families, and that, while progress was being made, more needed to be done.

*Item 5 – Child Protection Arrangements in Brent*

The Chair reported that the requested cross-party meeting to review child protection arrangements had been organised, to be attended by the Chair Vice Chair and Councillor Arnold.

*Item 7 – School Nursing*

The Chair reported that the report requested by the Committee on the outcome of the submission to NHS Brent of the business case for the school nursing service would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee, as no decision had yet been made.

*Item 10 – Work Programme*

The Committee's work programme for 2008/09 was distributed to members. The Chair reported that the 2009/10 work programme was being drawn up,

and would be presented at the next meeting. He encouraged members to contact him with proposed items and reported that the work programme would include a review of the work of the previous three years.

#### 4. **Progress of Brent Youth Parliament 2008-09**

Manveen Patwalia (Principal Youth Participation Manager) presented a report and answered questions from members on the progress made by the Brent Youth Parliament (BYP) in 2008/09, the second year of its operation. She introduced representatives of the parliament, including Petergaye Palmer, the current Chair, together with an adviser and a volunteer. They spoke of the experience they had gained through their involvement in the parliament, and answered questions from members on issues such as gender balance in the parliament, the involvement of primary school representatives and how Members of the Youth Parliament (MYPs) fed back information and publicised their work in schools.

Manveen Patwalia and the BYP representatives reported on progress against the BYP's terms of reference, as follows:

- to be the voice of young people in Brent
- to influence policy and have a say in decisions usually made by adults
- to promote the work of the BYP and celebrate the achievements of young people
- to work with the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) and influence national policy.

Work carried out by the BYP in 2008/09 included discussing the Council's complaints procedures, contributing to the design of the ARK Academy and taking active part in the UKYP. The BYP had selected five portfolios – crime prevention and public safety, health and social care, environment and culture, regeneration and economic development, and children and families – and had focussed on a single issue within each area. For example, the issue of street lighting in places where young people gather was raised under the crime prevention and public safety portfolio. Letters had been written to the relevant Lead Members and Directors of Brent Council requesting responses to the issues highlighted, and responses were already being received. A successful funding bid had been made to the government to support the BYP's chosen campaign of breaking down the stereotypes of young people. Two events to celebrate the achievements of young people had been held in February 2009 – an Oscar-style awards ceremony, attended by the Mayor of Brent, the Leader of the Council, and other distinguished guests, and Generation X-Factor, which recognised Brent's musical talent across generations.

Asked about the BYP's influence on policy-making, Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families) reported that the BYP had influenced policy on particular issues, and has raised the profile of the three priorities selected. The BYP was now represented on the new Civic Centre project and the Council was happy to take on board points made. Rik Boxer (Assistant

Director, Achievement and Inclusion) added that the BYP had directly affected priorities set out in the proposed Children and Young People's Plan, to be discussed later in this meeting. Carmen Coffey (Head of Communication and Student Support) reported that, in part as a result of consultation with the BYP, a drop-in sexual advice centre would be opening at Kingsbury High School in September 2009.

Members suggested that, in addition to contacting Lead Members and Directors, BYP representatives raise issues with local councilors, who themselves could take forward issues such as street lighting, for example.

The Chair congratulated the BYP representatives on their work, including the Oscars event, which he had attended. He reported that much of the work of the Committee had been inspired by issues raised by the BYP, and his view was that a BYP representative should be invited to each meeting of the Committee, at the very least as an observer. He also congratulated Manveen Patwalia on her work with the BYP and thanked her for her report.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) that the good progress of the BYP and the issues raised by the five portfolio groups be noted;
- (ii) to endorse the BYP's current campaign of breaking down the stereotypes of young people;
- (iii) that a BYP representative be invited to each meeting of the Committee, at the very least as an observer.

**5. Update on Primary and Secondary School Places**

Carmen Coffey (Head of Communication and Student Support) provided 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. She reported that 38 primary school age children were out of school currently, although there were schools with vacancies. For example, there were currently 98 vacancies in Reception classes. A total of 73 secondary age pupils were without a place. They were not out of school in the long term, rather in the process of being placed. Currently 126 pupils due to transfer to high school in September were unplaced, although there were 183 vacancies in the system. The challenge was to ensure that all pupils had a place for September.

For pupils starting primary school, offers had been sent out the previous week. The number of applications was higher than the previous year, and a total of 50 children across the borough had not been offered a place. This would change after the first round of offers. In addition to the 50 unplaced children, over 120 late applications had been received so far. A total of 80% of parents whose children were starting primary school in September had gained their first preference, 9% - their second and 3% - their third preference.

Answering questions from members, Carmen Coffey reported that the Council had been aware of the likely shortfall of places and had provided extra places

as soon as it was realised that the Council's own figures were predicting higher numbers than the Government Office for London two years previously. Not all the extra places had been taken up in the last year. Nevertheless, it was estimated that a further two classes would be needed for September 2009. The authority was aiming to encourage some schools to expand, but some were already four-form entry. Councillor Wharton (Lead Member, Children and Families) informed the Committee that expansion depended on which schools were able and willing to expand. He also pointed out, in response to a question about places in the Kingsbury and Queensbury areas, that there were vacancies at Kingsbury Green Primary School.

Carmen Coffey reported that neighbouring boroughs Harrow and Ealing were experiencing similar problems. She added that, since the primary school offers had gone out, over 200 phone calls had been received about expressing additional preferences. Around 20-25 calls were from parents who were very unhappy with the outcome for them, but the majority were re-choosing and understood that further offers would come in later rounds. Carmen Coffey pointed out that parents could contact officers if they were unhappy. Choices could be made up to 31 August. Parents also had the right to appeal, but it needed to be pointed out that the grounds on which appeals for infant classes could be upheld were more limited than for older children.

Asked whether the level of applications from outside the borough – 276 – was higher than in previous years, Carmen Coffey replied that she did not have this information to hand, but was happy to circulate it to members. She added that historically there had always been movement between boroughs, with many faith schools in Brent attracting pupils from other boroughs.

**RESOLVED:**

that the verbal update be noted.

## **6. Consultation on Children and Young People's Plan 2009/11**

Sarah Mansuralli (Head of Strategy and Commissioning) introduced the report and answered questions from members on the draft Children and Young People's Plan 2009/11. She reported that responses to the consultation had been positive, and the plan had been expanded in response to requests to provide more details. Subject to the Committee's approval, the plan would be presented to Council for full approval on 18 May 2009.

Representatives of the Teachers' Panel responded very positively to the plan and commented that it was a well-researched and well-written document. However, the contribution of the Teachers' Panel had not been mentioned. There was further comment on the Teachers' Panel being represented on Brent Children's Partnership. Sarah Mansuralli agreed that the Panel would be recognised in the plan and that she would convey the issue regarding representation on the Partnership to the chair. However, it should be noted that the Schools Forum was represented on the Partnership through school representatives who were also Forum members. The Chair also pointed out that the work of the Committee was not mentioned, despite its relevance to

issues covered in the plan. However, he agreed that the plan had been expanded and much improved since the earlier version and he commended its approval by Council.

RESOLVED:

- (i) to endorse the priorities set out in the draft Children and Young People's Plan 2009/11;
- (ii) to note that the work of the Committee had not been referred to in the governance section of the plan;
- (iii) to recommend that Council approve the plan at its 18 May 2009 meeting.

## 7. **Education Standards in Brent**

Faira Ellks (Head of School Improvement) presented the report and answered questions from members on key trends in education standards in Brent. She informed members that the original report had been written using unvalidated and, in some cases, incomplete data. The problems relating to national tests had also introduced delay and caused extra work. Faira Ellks emphasised that average test scores and exam results masked a wide polarity of outcomes and that success depended on various factors, particularly the pupil population and the extent to which schools coped with working in challenging circumstances. The quality of teaching was also important and, while many Brent schools had been affected by the recruitment crisis a few years before, this was now being worked through, and the School Improvement Service was helping to improve leadership and management in general.

Faira Ellks drew members' attention to the fact that, while there had been a significant improvement in standards at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, Brent was still below the national average, although in line with the rest of the region. The local authority had a target of narrowing the performance gap between the lowest performing 20% and the rest. While this gap was still wider than the national average, it had narrowed. Most of the patterns of performance were in evidence at the age of five.

At Key Stage 1 in terms of the key indicators of success – levels 2+ and 2b at end of Key Stage 1 – there was a continuing downward trend in Brent, and this was an area of concern. Primary school headteachers were taking this very seriously. The predictions for 2009 were mixed.

In terms of performance at the end of Key Stage 2, results were near the national average. It was hoped that the percentage of pupils making two levels of progress between Key Stages 1 and 2 would be higher than in the report.

At Key Stage 3 the number of low-performing schools had gone down. Overall, the data in the report was unreliable so far. At Key Stage 4 performance was good, as was usually the case. At Key Stage 5 Brent had been above the national and London average, but a fall was now predicted. However, when Brent's results were analysed in terms of added value it was in the top 20-25% nationally.

The Chair commented that attainment was below average early on, but then above average later, which was a credit to the system. Faira Ellks agreed that more needed to be done earlier, and the authority was now in a better position than it had been to support early years education. However, many children came into early years education with low starting points. Heads were discussing how best to deal with this and how to engage parents. Members emphasised the need to convey to parents the importance of literacy.

Members discussed demographic changes in Brent, pointing out the increasing number of pupils coming into the borough with little or no English. They noted that the Committee would be discussing achievement related to ethnicity at a future meeting.

Asked about gifted and talented pupils, Faira Ellks informed the committee that schools were now very good at tracking children, and assessment was at the heart of personalisation.

A member of the Teachers' Panel thanked Faira Ellks and her team for their work with schools, and members agreed that it was clear that performance was good, as demonstrated by the improvements made as pupils grew older.

The Chair agreed to write to teachers thanking them for their work in helping pupils achieve.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that a report on pupils' achievement related to ethnicity be discussed at a future meeting of the Committee;
- (iii) that the Chair write to the borough's teachers to thank them for their work in helping pupils achieve success in tests and examinations.

**8. Swimming Opportunities in Brent**

Gerry Kiefer (Head of Sports Service) and Mick McDonnell (Adviser, PE and Sport) introduced the report and answered questions from members on the provision of swimming facilities and opportunities in the borough. In November 2008 the Council's Executive agreed the borough's sports strategy, which identified the need for two additional public swimming pools and agreed the provision of a pool in the north of the borough. A consultant was working on potential sites and funding opportunities, and a report anticipated in the first week of June.

Mick McDonnell informed the Committee of the concern that only 44% of primary school pupils in Brent could swim 25 metres, against the national average of 80%. While swimming was offered in all primary schools, its provision was a significant strain on schools in terms of loss of time. Gerry Kiefer reported that young people engaged in swimming outside the curriculum. For example around half of the users of Vale Farm and Willesden pools were young people. Brent was offering free swimming, classes for girls, and there was a swimming club. It was also hoped to be able to access some school pools to offer targeted sessions. In addition, there was a temporary

pool at Preston Park Primary School, and six temporary pools were available for London in connection with the build-up to the 2012 Olympics.

Members discussed ways of encouraging young people to swim and schools to take up swimming provision in the context of competing pressures on schools. Gerry Kiefer reported that the temporary pool at Preston Park meant that swimming was available every day, and that it would be interesting to see if progress was better as a result. If so, it might be possible to review the timetable. A member of the Teachers' Panel emphasised the need for schools to give time to subjects other than maths, English and science and organise the timetable accordingly.

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted.

#### 9. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the provisional date for the next meeting was Tuesday 16 June 2009, to be confirmed at the annual meeting of Council on 18 May 2009.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm.

W MOTLEY  
Chair