



MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 10 December 2013 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Mitchell Murray (Chair), Councillor and Councillors Aden, Arnold, Gladbaum, Mr A Frederick, Ms E Points, Dr Levison, Sullivan, Ms J Cooper, Mrs L Gouldbourne, Brent Youth Parliament representatives and Jones

Also present: Councillors Pavey

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Matthews, CJ Patel and Ms C Jolinon

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Minutes of the last meeting held on 10 October 2013

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 October 2013 were approved as an accurate record subject to the following amendments:

- (i) Councillor Pavey to be included in the list of Members present.
- (ii) Councillor Mitchell Murray's apologies for absence to be recorded.

3. Matters arising

None raised.

4. Brent Youth Parliament update

Edison Lasku (Chair of Brent Youth Parliament (BYP)) and Roisin Healy (Media Representative BYP) advised that elections for BYP would be held on Saturday 14 December 2013 and would be supported by Democratic Services. The representatives explained that they would be stepping down from their current positions and advised that members' acquaint themselves with the new BYP Executive following the elections. Several additional roles had been created for BYP members to undertake and there would now be two treasurer posts, four United Kingdom Youth Parliament (UKYP) posts and two media representatives posts. Events and activities in the forthcoming year would include a team building residential, creation of an AQA qualification recognising the personal development of BYP members, assistance with CV building, UKYP induction, and the regional campaign. Members were advised that the regional campaign would focus on the issues of Curriculum for Life and lowering the voting age to 16 year olds.

Responding to members queries, the representatives advised that the additional posts were funded via the local authority and had been created to share the

significant workload amongst members, extend opportunities for members to learn new skills, and to minimise the division between the Executive and other BYP members. Eve Baker (Service Manager – Youth Support Services) emphasised that by having greater oversight of their finances, the BYP had reduced spending against various areas. The meeting was further advised that following the BYP elections, there would be an increase in the number of members and schools represented. Every secondary school in Brent had been contacted, including at least one SEN school. At the present time there were five members with SEN. It was agreed that further information could be provided on the success of the Curriculum for Life campaign.

The Committee expressed its congratulations and thanks to the BYP representatives and requested to be kept up to date on the progress of the regional campaigns.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

5. Education Standards in Brent 2013

Rebecca Matthews (Interim Head of School Improvement) presented a report to the committee on education standards achieved in Brent schools for 2012/13 academic year. The report provided a snapshot of the Ofsted ratings of Brent's schools as at November 2013 and outlined the national context for the changing relationship between local authorities and schools in relation to school improvement. It was highlighted that a new Ofsted inspection framework had been introduced at the start of the 2013/14. Changes to the criteria for 'good' and 'outstanding' ratings meant that schools which currently held those ratings could be vulnerable at re-inspection. 80 percent of Brent's secondary schools were rated good or outstanding, against 87 percent in London and 72 percent nationally. Similarly 78 percent of Primary schools in Brent held these ratings compared to 85 percent in London and 78 percent nationally. Enhanced support was provided to those schools which were judged to be in special measures, requiring improvement or were considered to have fragile ratings, to ensure that all schools progressed towards good or outstanding.

Rebecca Matthews drew Members' attention to the report attached as Appendix A, which detailed attainment of key measures at Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Key Stages 1, 2, and 4 by Brent pupils against London and National averages. Comparable data was also provided for academic years 2010/11 and 2011/12 and a further breakdown of achievement by ethnicity and for those children qualifying for the Pupil Premium was set out for the committee's information. It was explained that the Pupil Premium was additional funding provided to schools to address underlying inequalities between children eligible for free school meals (FSM) and their peers.

In outlining the key trends evident in the report, Rebecca Matthews highlighted that standards in Brent Schools at EYFS had shown improvement and the equality gap was closing. There was an improving three year trend at KS1, with schools in the borough meeting national averages. Progress at KS2 was considered to be less secure; whilst assessment measures had changed making direct comparison

difficult, the borough's schools were falling behind national and London averages. Results at KS4 had reversed the decline marked in the previous year and now exceeded the national average. The breakdown of attainment by ethnicity reported results for the three main ethnic groups represented in Brent; Black Caribbean, Somali and White Other. Members were advised that as the cohorts were small, the figures provided should be treated with some caution; however there was an improving picture at KS1 with Brent pupils achieving in line and often better than national comparisons. At KS2 pupils of the three main ethnic groups performed better than the Brent averages. Whilst progress had been made at KS4, attainment for the three groups was still less than national comparisons. Members were further advised that achievement for children eligible for the Pupil Premium was positive, with a general reduction in the gap between this group and their peers and higher standards achieved against most measures.

In concluding the presentation, Rebecca Matthews detailed the actions being taken to support and challenge Brent's schools to improve. These actions included the development of a new Brent School Improvement Core Offer, the rationalisation of a range of EYFS projects to enhance focus on raising standards, training and support for governing bodies, and working with the Brent Schools Partnership to develop a programme of professional development aimed at addressing areas of weaknesses.

Several queries were raised by members during the subsequent discussion. The committee sought further information regarding the choice to limit the breakdown of attainment by ethnicity to the three largest ethnic groups represented in Brent. It was commented that there were some significant demographic differences between Brent's Schools. Members queried the analysis of the figures provided regarding Ofsted ratings, noting a disparity between the conclusions drawn for secondary schools and those regarding primary schools. Similarly, further explanation was requested regarding the stated difficulty in making comparisons with London and National figures for nurseries, special schools and pupil referral units. Members also queried whether the School Improvement Team worked with PVI sector nurseries. Additional details were sought on the Education Commission established by the council. Officers were asked to expand on the planned action to rationalise EYFS projects and it was queried whether the School Improvement Team formed part of the Brent Schools Partnership.

Addressing the issues raised, Rebecca Matthews explained that figures could be provided for other ethnic groups represented in Brent or other schools such as nurseries or PRUs; however it was noted that any conclusions drawn from small data cohorts could not be considered reliable. It was subsequently agreed that details of population sizes would be provided to members. Sara Williams added that the report had sought to focus on areas of underachievement. It was acknowledged that schools did have different demographics but the focus of the School Improvement Team was to support the sharing of best practice, so that those doing well at addressing areas of inequality could help other schools achieve the same success. With regard to the analysis provided of the Ofsted ratings of Brent's Schools, Rebecca Matthews advised that the size of the cohort differed for Secondary and Primary Schools. As a consequence, the individual results impacted the overall average to a greater or lesser extent depending on school sector; this therefore affected the conclusions drawn. It was emphasised that the local authority

was not dependent on the cooperation of schools in gathering data on academic attainment as it was all available in the public domain.

The committee was advised that the School Improvement Team did not work with the PVI nursery sector, instead this fell within the remit of a separate team funded via the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Rebecca Matthews informed the committee that a variety of EYFS projects had been undertaken by the Schools Improvement Team but these had since been rationalised and redesigned to ensure a clear focus on raising standards. It was considered that managing fewer projects would allow clearer dissemination of the project outcomes. The Schools Improvement Team did not form part of the Brent Schools Partnership; however, it did work closely with the partnership and currently attended its management meetings. Sara Williams outlined the aims of the Education Commission which had been established by the Executive in early 2013, following similar actions by a number of other local authorities. The Education Commission would enable the council to take a step back, examine education in the borough and consider how the local authority could fulfil its role in the changing landscape of the education sector. Christine Gilbert (Interim Chief Executive Brent Council) was leading on the initiative and was supported by colleagues including Professor Toby Greaney (Institute of Education, University College London), Gerard Kelly (Editor of the Times Educational Supplement) and Robert Hill (government policy adviser and consultant on education and school issues). The Education Commission would produce a report setting out its recommendations which would then be explored by council officers.

The committee expressed its disappointment that the report did not include a section on the child poverty implications. A request was made that a copy of the Child Poverty Strategy be provided to members. Members asked that the report of the Education Commission also be submitted for the committee's consideration, alongside information on work currently being undertaken regarding social mobility. A further request was made for a short report on the training provided by the school improvement team.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

6. **School Places update**

Sara Williams (Acting Director Children and Families) outlined the position regarding school places and applications as at 6 December 2013. The committee heard that there were sufficient secondary school places and the small number of pupils waiting for an offer of a place were due to the application processing time. There remained a shortage of primary school places however. There were currently 51 pupils without an offer of a Year 2 place, against 27 vacancies. The pressure on Reception Year places remained particularly significant, with 115 pupils without offers and only 33 vacancies. New classes were being opened at the start of the new term in January 2014 to accommodate these pupils. The classes would be located in the Gwenneth Rickus building and the former Strathcona Day care centre. The council would be revisiting its expansion and school places strategy in the coming months based on the new projections from the Department for Education.

The Committee queried what feedback the council was receiving on the pressures being experienced by families with little or no reasonable options of school places for their children and how this information was being captured and fed into the formation of policy. Sara Williams explained that there were planning areas used for primary school places and the council aimed to locate new school places in areas of particular need; however this was becoming an increasingly difficult undertaking with schools less able or willing to expand and a lack of available sites for new schools. It was expected that the government would require the council to assume a more aggressive stance in this respect.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

7. **Working with Families update**

Sara Williams (Acting Director, Children and Families) delivered a presentation to the committee on the Working with Families (WwF) initiative. It was explained that the WwF approach was family focussed and aimed to address all dimensions of need including unemployment, housing, parenting capacity, child development, health and behaviour. WwF encompassed a range of integrated and multi-agency support services, with appropriate step-up and step-down arrangements. It increased the resource base for early intervention and met Brent's commitment to the national Troubled Families Programme.

Sara Williams explained that the WwF objectives were delivered through several key work streams including the Brent Family Front Door service. This was a multi-agency team, bringing together services across social care, the police, health and education and would act as a first point of contact for all referrals received. For those families identified as requiring further support through the WwF initiative, the Family Solutions Team, a multi-disciplinary network of specialist key workers, delivered bespoke packages of support. Members were also introduced to two new edge of care services; FAIR (Family Assessment and Intervention Resource) and FAST(Family and Adolescent Support Team). The FAST worked with families at the point of crisis to support families and prevent adolescents (10 years and over) from entering the care system whenever safe to do so. FAIR sought to address the gap in assessment and interventions services for families with younger children where care proceedings were under active consideration, working to help the family stay together where possible. It was emphasised that early intervention services helped reduce the often high costs of providing ongoing support for families.

A brief overview of the Troubled Families Programme was provided by Sara Williams. The payment-by-results programme required that the council work with at least 810 of the boroughs most vulnerable families by March 2015 to deliver evidence-based solutions and coordinate support required from a variety of agencies via a key worker. The council had thus far worked with 303 families (Cohort 1) and was currently working with a further 200 families (Cohort 2). Phase 3 of the programme would be accelerated through work to improve the involvement of other agencies and the provision of additional key workers.

In the ensuing discussion, the committee asked officers to comment on the availability and turnover of staff within the support teams and whether this impacted the ability of workers to build relationships with families. An explanation was sought of how the teams related to each other, how they were funded and the professional criteria for the workers within the teams. With reference to the online form which enabled referrals to be made to the Brent Family Front Door service, it was queried who this facility was aimed at and how it would be promoted. Clarification was requested in relation to the 'basket of local criteria' which formed one of the criterion established by the Communities and Local Government Department which must be met to claim payment by results

Sara Williams advised in response to members' questions that the person specification for key worker posts did not require applicants to be qualified social workers and instead sought those with relevant skills and the necessary tenacity to undertake a very proactive and practical role. An intensive training programme was provided for Key Workers. It was emphasised that there was very little staff turn over for Key Workers. Sara Williams confirmed that whilst the FAIR and FAST teams were managed within the Children's Social Services department, the WwF initiative formed part of the broader early help offer. The FAST team was funded via the Social Care budget, whilst the FAIR team was temporarily being funded through the Troubled Families grant; it was anticipated however, that the Social Care budget would accommodate funding for the FAIR team in the future as early intervention work reduced service pressure. The Brent Front Door Service had been established using funding from the Troubled Families grant but would be taken forward by Social Care. Further information would be provided regarding the respective budgets for the various teams. Councillor Pavey (Lead Member for Children and Families) explained that the budget for early intervention projects was ringfenced for 2014/15.

Members were further advised by Sara Williams that the option to complete an online form to submit a referral to the Brent Family Front Door Service was available to members of the public and was publicised via Brent's website. Susan Gates (Head of Early Years and Family Support) advised that to claim payment by results three criterion had to be met; two must be drawn from the criteria set nationally and the third could be locally determined. Sara Williams explained that that the basket of local criteria had enabled targeting of those adversely affected by the Welfare Reforms.

Responding to a question regarding Social Worker case loads, Sara Williams advised that early help services provided an effective step-down service for appropriate cases. However, case loads remained high. It was agreed that further information regarding the impact of the WwF initiative on social worker case loads would be provided to the committee.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

8. Children's Centres Update

Susan Gates (Head of Early Years and Family Support) introduced a detailed report to the committee setting out the progress achieved by the council in securing

sufficient integrated early childhood services through children's centres. The report described the movement from 2011/12 to a locality model of children centres in accordance with the requirement to reduce expenditure on Children's Centres by £1.2m. This model introduced shared management and the operation of staff across multiple sites under a single locality advisory board. It was noted that this was a model being increasingly adopted by local authorities. An outline of the most recent guidance and direction from central government was provided and Members' were apprised of the impact of the new Ofsted inspection framework which came into force in April 2013. The committee heard that the focus of Ofsted inspection had shifted to three areas of judgement (previously twenty) with significant implications for partnership working, information sharing, definition, identification and engagement of target group households and the planning and delivery of services. It was noted that Willesden locality had been amongst the first children's centre localities nationally to be inspected under the revised framework. The Willow nursery which was attached to the Willow Children's centre had also been inspected as an early years setting. The outcomes of these inspections (requires improvement and inadequate respectively) were considered disappointing and not reflective of the improvement in quality of provision. Sue Gates highlighted the required actions identified and work undertaken in response to the judgements.

Members discussed the report and raised a number of issues. Councillor Gladbaum advised that she had reviewed the Ofsted reports for Brent's children's centres and highlighted to the meeting that under the old framework there had been 7 children's centres inspected, 3 of which had received good ratings; in contrast, 8 centres had been inspected under the new framework and of those 8, only 1 had received a good rating. Additional explanation was therefore sought regarding the changed inspection framework and the mapping of progress across this. The committee further queried the number of qualified teachers employed in children's centres.

Addressing the issues raised, Susan Gates emphasised that there had been improvement achieved across all of Brent's Children's Centres. However, the Ofsted inspection requirements had changed in April 2013 and it would take time to adjust to these and embed the new regime. Members were advised that local authorities across London had similarly struggled to do well under the new arrangements. A particular feature of these arrangements was the focus on data analysis which placed a new requirement on staff and would take time to assimilate. Susan Gates further explained that the requirement to have a qualified teacher had been removed two years previously. Qualified teacher input was an expensive resource but was provided as a shared resource within localities. It was noted that it was very rare to have qualified teacher input in PVI sector nurseries.

The committee thanked the officer for the report and for her contribution to the meeting; however, it was noted that the meeting had been presented with an overview of progress achieved by the Early Years Team, rather than a focussed analysis of its strengths and weaknesses as had been requested. The committee therefore agreed that a subsequent report providing this analysis be submitted to its meeting in March 2014 and that this analysis reflect the points raised in the relevant Ofsted reports.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the report before the committee be noted;

- (ii) that a report analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the Early Years Team be provided to the committee at its meeting in March 2014.

9. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

It was agreed that the work programme be updated to include the committee's requests made in the meeting and to include a report on all through schools.

10. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the committee would be held on 5 February 2014.

11. Any other urgent business

None raised.

The meeting closed at 9.11 pm

Councillor Mitchel Murray
Chair