



MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday 19 March 2014 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Mitchell Murray (Chair), Arnold, Gladbaum, Mr A Frederick and Kataria and Mr A Frederick (Co-opted Member) and Brent Youth Parliament Representatives (Observers)

Also present: Councillors Hunter and John

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillor Al-Ebadi, Ms E Points, Dr Levison, Sullivan, Ms J Cooper, Mrs L Gouldbourne and Ms C Jolinon (Observer)

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

1. Deputations (if any)

2. Minutes of the last meeting held on 5 February 2014

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 February 2014 be approved as an accurate record.

3. Matters arising

Christopher Young (Policy Officer) provided a verbal update on the work relating to the council's Child Poverty Strategy 2011 – 2021. The committee was informed that all of the key work streams identified in the strategy's action plan were being delivered. However, these constituted a range of projects, rather than one overall programme. Work was currently underway to ensure that an overview of these activities was maintained going forward within the Assistant Chief Executive's department and a further update would be provided to the committee in the new municipal year. It was emphasised that the government was currently consulting on a revised child poverty strategy and members of the committee were encouraged to view this.

The meeting was further advised that there was an improving picture of child poverty in Brent. Christopher Young explained that the government defined a child as being in relative poverty if they lived in a household with an income of less than 60 per cent of the national median income. Based on this definition, the percentage of Brent children living in poverty had fallen from 39.5 percent in 2012 to 28.1 percent in 2014. Improvements in other key indicators including life expectancy, childhood

obesity, teenage conception rates and the number of children entering the care system, further illustrated this trend.

The committee emphasised that it was important that sufficient overview and monitoring of these key work streams was maintained by the appropriate officers and that there was clear ownership of this task. Further to this, the Chair expressed concern that it sometimes took too long for reports to reach the committee.

A query was raised by a Brent Youth Parliament representative regarding the actions of the council to tackle childhood obesity. Sara Williams (Acting Director of Children and Families) advised that this was a target of the council's Health and Wellbeing Plan and related activities included encouraging good nutrition and physical activity, making sport and leisure facilities more accessible and supporting a healthy schools programme. Further work was required to understand the causes of childhood obesity, however.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the update be noted;
- (ii) that details of the key indicators be circulated to the committee.

4. Brent Youth Parliament update

Representatives of Brent Youth Parliament (BYP) presented a report updating the committee on the recent work of BYP. The committee heard details of items discussed during BYP sessions and were apprised of the activities relating to the BYP campaign on Youth Employment and Training, including plans to host a job fair for young people. An overview was provided of the body's future plans and it was emphasised that the long term objective remained to increase the proportion of young people in Brent given opportunities to influence local decisions. In concluding, the BYP representatives reminded the committee that BYP sessions were held on the last Saturday of every month at Brent Civic Centre and councillors were very welcome to attend.

The committee noted the update and thanked the representatives for their report.

5. Task Group Report on Tackling Violence against Women and Girls in Brent

The committee considered the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group on Tackling Violence against Women and Girls in Brent. Councillor John (Chair of the Task Group) explained that the task group, established by the Health Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee, had focussed on three harmful practices; Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Honour Based Violence (HBV) and Forced Marriage (FM). It was recognised that Brent's ethnically diverse population had religious and cultural ties to areas of the world where these harmful practices were prevalent and that these offences were considerably under reported both nationally and locally. Given the complexity of the issues, the task group had chosen to conduct its work over the period of year, during which time it met with a relevant organisations and community groups, as well as individuals directly affected by these practices.

Councillor John outlined the main findings of the task group and drew members' attention to the recommendations that had been made. The committee heard that it had not been possible to accurately ascertain the prevalence of FGM, HBV or FM in Brent and the task group had concluded that the data that did exist was not adequately shared between partner organisations. However, the weight of anecdotal evidence had led the task group to determine that a mapping exercise to identify the numbers of those at risk should be conducted. It had further been concluded that a harmful practices strategy should be developed to sit within the wider Violence against women and Girls Strategy to improve co-ordination between partners and ensure a clear framework existed for partners to work within. Councillor John emphasised that many of the task group's findings had related to the need to raise awareness and improve understanding around these harmful practices. As part of a series of actions proposed, the task group wanted to see relevant posters displayed in all doctors surgeries and schools and for all school governors to be well informed of these issues. Councillor John concluded her presentation by highlighting the importance of raising awareness amongst the young people of Brent and suggested that the Brent Youth Parliament give consideration to discussing these issues during their sessions.

In the subsequent discussion members of the BYP expressed their wish to get involved and it was suggested that the BYP could take the subject up with schools and help to raise awareness such as by the production of a video or other via media.

The committee thanked the members of the task group and agreed to support the recommendations of the task group set out in their report.

6. School Places - verbal update

Sara Williams (Acting Director of Children and Families) advised that at present there were sufficient places across all year groups. Every child had received an offer of a school place, with the exception of three recent applications that were still being processed. There were 110 children who had been offered places but had not yet started at the schools in question; the admissions team was working hard to progress this situation. Of these 110 children, 29 were in Reception year and 18 of these were not yet of statutory school age. 11 children had been referred to the education welfare service for non-attendance. Sara Williams emphasised that there would be lots of challenges to face for September 2014.

Responding to queries raised by the committee, Sara Williams advised that there remained a steady flow of families into the borough. Families that moved out of the borough had the option to keep their children at their schools in Brent, either through commuting or by boarding with relatives. However, the council also ensured that children of families that had moved to new locations were registered at schools in those new locations. The number of complaints received by the service had significantly reduced and those that were received were predominately related to parents not having received an offer of a school place for their child at their preferred school.

The committee thanked Sara Williams and noted the update on school places in Brent.

7. Annual Activity Survey 2013

Angela Chiswell (Head of Youth Support Services) and John Galligan (School Improvement Lead – Secondary/14-19) presented a report updating the committee on the Annual Activity Survey. It was explained that the purpose of the survey was to find out what employment, training or education activities school leavers were engaged in as at 1 November. The local authority had a duty to track and record the participation of young people and to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education or training.

The key trends evident from the survey data were outlined to the committee by Angela Chiswell. It was noted that the number of young people in Brent had increased by 4.6 percent between 2009 and 2013. There had been a slight increase in the numbers of those not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) but Brent's performance ranked 8th nationally and was better than both the London and national average; this was considered a very good performance, particularly when coupled with Brent's low number of young people with unknown activity status. The overall level of participation in learning via full and part-time routes remained unchanged at 94.2 percent from 2012. However, there had been a slight change in the choice of routes taken, with a small increase in the numbers of those choosing part-time learning or employment.

John Galligan highlighted that the percentage of students studying Level 3 courses had fallen from 78.7 percent in 2012 to 69.7 percent in 2013, whilst participation at Levels 1 and 2 had increased from 21.3 percent to 30.4 percent over this period. It was explained that some young people benefitted from studying at Levels 1 or 2 for a year before moving on to A levels and that this had been found to improve A level drop out rates. Unfortunately, it had recently been announced that funding for the third year of post-16 education would be cut by 25 percent from September 2014. The government's Equality Impact Assessment had identified that this change would disproportionately affect London and Black and Minority Ethnic groups. Though London had a higher university progression rates, it also had a high number of pupils taking a three year route.

In the subsequent discussion, the committee queried whether the introduction of the pupil premium was evident from the destinations data and requested that future reports detail the uptake of vocational courses. A member also sought further information regarding the tracking of those entering into apprenticeships.

John Galligan advised that it was too soon after the introduction of the pupil premium to fully examine the impact but agreed that in future there should be an analysis of the destinations data for those pupils who had been funded. Apprenticeships and employment was tracked up to the age of 19 and up to the age of 25 for those with Learning Disabilities. The option of an employability passport for young people had been discussed with the 14-19 Partnership which included head teacher representatives. This passport would enable young people to gain skills with employers whilst they were still in school and to evidence those skills when applying for employment opportunities, including apprenticeships.

The committee noted the report and thanked the officers for their contribution to the meeting.

8. Audits by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board

Graham Genoni (Operational Director Social Care) presented a report to the committee setting out the statutory responsibilities of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to quality assure the safeguarding work of the council and its partner agencies. The report also outlined the types, methods and outcomes for 2013/14 of the quality assurance work undertaken. This work was divided into three dimensions; effective organisational practice, effective multi agency practices and the effectiveness of the Brent LSCB, respectively. Dimension 1 required each organisation to report on work completed in specific areas, share outcomes of inspections and to self-evaluate their service against an agreed Section 11 (Children Act 2004) audit template. Dimension 2 encompassed a multi-agency audit programme and analysis of a detailed LSCB data set on the performance of services for children. Dimension 3 was supported by a self-evaluation audit tool, the outcome of which informed the Board's business plan for the following year, and the annual appraisal of the Chair of the LSCB. In concluding his presentation, Graham Genoni, drew members attention to the summaries of the multi-agency audits completed in 2013/14.

During the following discussion queries were raised regarding barriers to information sharing amongst partner agencies and the role played by children's centres in multiagency working. Graham Genoni explained that information sharing was good and continued to improve. This was supported in particular by the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and the Brent Front Door service, through which all safeguarding referrals were channelled. There were difficulties in achieving the correct balance between confidentiality and good information sharing and the new Ofsted inspection regime sought evidence that information sharing protocols were being appropriately adhered to. A member commented that safeguarding was the responsibility of all and Graham Genoni advised that there would be mandatory safeguarding training for all council staff.

The committee thanked Graham Genoni for his presentation and noted the report.

9. The Work of the Brent Youth Offending Service

Angela Chiswell (Head of Youth Support Services) presented a report updating the committee on the work of the Brent Youth Offending Service (YOS), focussing on service performance, the revised inspection arrangements and the impact of changes to the legislative framework. It was explained that the YOS formed part of the council's youth support service and comprised a multi-agency team working across the Police, Probation Service, Social Care, Health, the Courts and Crown Prosecution Service. The principal aim of the service was to reduce the risk of young people offending or re-offending.

Angela Chiswell advised that the introduction of the provisions outlined in the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012 had resulted in a number of significant changes for the work of the YOS. In particular, a change to Out of Court disposals had effectively removed the 'escalator' of reprimands and final warnings. Therefore a young person who had previously offended and then

subsequently committed a much lesser offence would not automatically progress to the next stage in the youth justice system. For the YOS, this meant that the workload relating to Referral Orders imposed for minor offences was anticipated to decrease. A further key change brought about by the LASPO Act 2012, was the introduction of Looked After status for children or young people remanded into custody. As a consequence, local authorities now bore financial responsibility via the Social Care Budget for the cost of secure remands, following a transfer of funding based on previous years usage. Furthermore, young people remanded beyond 13 weeks would be eligible for leaving care status. A social worker had been employed to address this new responsibility.

The key performance indicators (KPIs) for the YOS were outlined to the committee by Angela Chiswell. Members heard that the percentage of re-offending by young people in Brent had increased from 35.5 percent in 2011/12 to 45.8 percent in 2013/14 and there had also been an increase in the percentage of young people receiving custodial sentences. At present, Brent was part of a Youth Justice Board national pilot which sought to test the success of targeted interventions with certain re-offending groups. It was emphasised that the statutory assessments conducted by the YOS in 2012-13 had triggered a Risk of Serious Harm (ROSH) assessment in 65 percent of cases and a Vulnerability Management Plan (VMP) in 45 percent of cases. VMPs set out measures to protect young people who had offended. Over the same period there had also been 38 referrals under the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA); offenders eligible for MAPPA included registered sexual offenders and violent offenders sentenced to at least 12 months detention. Given the serious nature of the offences associated with MAPPA, and the cohort (young people aged 10 to 17 years old), the number of these referrals was considered to be quite high. In concluding her presentation, Angela Chiswell advised that the YOS was subject to inspection by the HM Inspectorate of Probation and the inspection arrangements were considerably changed from the framework since Brent YOS was last inspected in December 2011.

The committee thanked Angela Chiswell for her report and sought additional analysis, by gender and age, of the figures presented. A breakdown by ethnicity, gender and age was also requested in relation to those young people who qualified for support via Triage. Angela Chiswell advised that this information could be provided.

In the ensuing discussion, members questioned the contributing factors to Brent's high rate of youth offending and asked for further comment on the links with gang activity. The committee also queried the success of the pilot scheme and asked what strategies were in place to exploit the existing resources of the council including children's centres, the troubled families initiative and the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

Responding to the issues raised, Angela Chiswell explained that there were a number of factors which could be identified as overlapping with higher rates of youth offending, including poverty and being in the group of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). Furthermore, Brent was one of the 17 London Boroughs which received additional funding to tackle gang related issues. The committee was assured that the YOS worked closely with the Early Years and Family Support team, as well as the Community Safety team. Sara Williams (Interim Director of Children and Families) advised that a key focus of the Working

with Families (troubled families) approach had been to align services; this had been achieved very successfully between the Working with Families service and YOS and it was recognised that there was significant overlap in their respective cohorts. As part of this work, an exercise had been conducted to identify whether the families of those young offenders known to the YOS met the criteria for support via the Working with Families service. The committee was informed that the funding for the Troubled Families initiative had been extended for a further three years and it was hoped that the criteria would be extended to encompass families with younger children to enable a more preventative approach to be fostered.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that an update be provided on the Youth Justice Board national pilot scheme in due course;
- (ii) that an update be provided on the integration of the council's resources in tackling youth offending in Brent and the impact of early intervention services on the work of the Youth Offending Service;
- (iii) that further analysis of the figures provided by gender and age be provided to the committee;
- (iv) that a breakdown by ethnicity, gender and age of those young people who qualified for triage services be provided to the committee.

10. Children's Centres

A report providing an overview of the Council's progress in securing sufficient integrated early childhood services through children's centres was presented to the committee by Sue Gates (Head of Early Years and Family Support). The report detailed the recent changes to service delivery and highlighted the strengths, challenges and key priorities for the service going forward. It was explained that the service had begun to improve outcomes for young children and families and that successes included increased levels of engagement with families via children's centres and strengthened approaches to joint working and data sharing with partners and other council services.

A locality model of service delivery had been implemented in 2011/12. This model had introduced shared management and the operation of staff across multiple sites under shared locality advisory boards. In addressing the challenges for the service, Sue Gates, advised that significant work had been undertaken to strengthen these advisory boards to improve the effectiveness of the governance in challenging the practice and priorities of children's centres. Other challenges related to the management of performance, particularly in improving the skills and confidence of leaders and managers to use data to drive service planning and review, and the ongoing fiscal pressures which required continued innovation in service delivery. The committee was advised that lots of training and support had been provided to managers around the use of data and significant improvements had been achieved. Strengthening leadership would remain a priority for the service, alongside increasing the recruitment of skilled volunteers, increasing the employability of

parents of young children and driving continuous improvement, particularly in relation to outcomes for families at greater risk of experiencing disadvantage. .

A member expressed concern regarding the impact of reduced funding and commented on the importance of continued scrutiny of the progress achieved of the service. During further discussion, a query was raised regarding the work between children's centres and General Practitioners (GPs) and Public Health. Sue Gates advised that some progress had been made with GPs but difficulties had arisen due to their hours of operation. However, often GPs relied on the work of health visitors and midwives with children's centres; these relationships were well established and productive. At present, the council also had an Early Years Public Health Officer who supported a Healthy Early Years programme. The officer was currently funded via the Public Health budget but this was only for one year of the project. Public Health funding for children under five years old would not be allocated to the local authority until 2015.

The committee noted the report and thanked the officers for their attendance at the meeting.

11. Progress on the Borough Plan - Children and Young People

The committee noted that this item had been deferred.

12. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be updated to include:

- (i) An update on the Youth Justice Board national pilot scheme to be presented to the committee in due course;
- (ii) an update on the integration of the council's resources in tackling youth offending in Brent and the impact of early intervention services on the work of the Youth Offending Service.

13. Date of next meeting

The committee noted that the date of the next meeting of the committee would be confirmed at the Annual Council meeting scheduled for 4 June 2014.

14. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 9.40 pm

CLLR MITCHELL MURRAY
Chair