



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 23 February 2010 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Motley (Chair) and Councillors Arnold, Mistry, J Moher and CJ Patel, together with Mr Akisanya (Voting Co-optee)

Also Present: Councillor Wharton (Lead Member for Children and Families) and Ms J Cooper (Observer - Teachers' Panel), Mrs L Gouldbourne (Observer - Teachers' Panel), Hank Roberts (Observer - Teacher's Panel) and Priyesh Patel (Observer - Brent Youth Parliament representative)

Apologies were received from: Councillors Mrs Fernandes, Tancred and Dr Levison (Non-Voting Co-optee) and Ms Jolinson (Observer – Teachers' Panel)

1. **Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests**

There were no declarations of interest declared at this stage of the meeting. However, Councillor Mistry declared an interest during item 8, on the School Status and Diversity report, with regards to the discussion on Copland Community School as she was an employee of Copland Community School.

2. **Deputations (if any)**

None.

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 December 2009 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. **Matters arising (if any)**

The Chair advised that the Youth Offending Task Group had recently visited the youth inclusion project to observe what was taking place. He added that they had found it to be a very interesting and worthwhile visit.

5. **Early Years Single Funding Formula**

Following a request at the last Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Mustafa Salih (Assistant Director of Finance and Resources, Children and Families) provided the committee with an update on the introduction of the Early Years Single Funding Formula and changes to the allocation and funding of early years full time places. He drew the committee's attention to the report which went to the Executive on the 15 February 2010.

Mustafa Salih explained that the Government had initially wanted all local authorities to introduce the Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF) from April 2010, but in December 2009 decided that it would be delayed until April 2011 as a number of councils were not ready to introduce it. He added that the Government had, however, encouraged those councils which were ready to implement from April 2010 to do so by applying to become a path finder authority. He advised that the Executive had agreed to implement the formula in Brent from April 2010 and that this was also the recommendation of the Schools Forum which met in January 2010.

Mustafa Salih informed the committee that the introduction of the EYSFF had provided the Council with an opportunity to review the criteria for the allocation and funding of full time early years places. He explained that the objective was to devise a transparent and common process across the whole sector that would allocate a full time place based on the need and vulnerability of the child. Mustafa Salih explained that the schools forum had raised a concern that if the changes were implemented for 2010, there would not be sufficient time for consultation with parents. Furthermore, Mustafa Salih stated that there was some uncertainty that the DCSF would have the regulations in place to allow schools to charge parents in readiness for September 2010. For these reasons, he stated that it had been decided to delay the implementation of the proposals, with regards to full time places, until September 2011. This, he stated, would allow enough time for thorough consultation to take place with parents.

In the discussion which followed, a request was made that information on the sufficiency of early years places in the borough be included in the report which was coming to the next Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny committee on school places. In response to a concern raised regarding the impact it would have on those mainstream nurseries, which would see their number of full time places decrease, Mustafa Salih explained that some of the mainstream nurseries, which he had spoken to regarding this issue, had told him that they would consider increasing the number of part time places available. He added that he had also discussed with them that they would have an option of charging for a full time place if parents were willing to pay. In answering a question regarding the consultation on the changes to the allocation and funding of early years full time places, Mustafa Salih explained that the council would most likely be consulting both parents that had children who were due to go to nursery and parents whose children were already in nursery. He advised that the changes would, however, only affect those children who were going to be starting nursery.

A representative from the Teachers' Panel raised a concern that if a parent was unable to afford to pay for a part time place to be topped up to a full time place, a child in need could miss out on a full time place. In response, Mustafa Salih explained that the changes would ensure that it would be the most deprived children who would receive the full time places. The representative also raised a concern that if there was a children's centre attached to a nursery, a teacher could end up having two different employers over the day.

The Chair stated that the committee would revisit this issue later on in the year.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the update and Executive report, dated 15 February 2010, be noted;
- (ii) that information on the sufficiency of early years places in the borough be included in the report on school places, which was coming to the next Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25 March 2010.

6. **Supporting schools to succeed**

Faira Ellks (Head of School Improvement Service) introduced the report which aimed to inform members about the lowest performing schools in Brent, the factors which contributed to their low performance and the action which had been taken by the Local Authority and the schools themselves to address the challenges. She began by highlighting that there were three schools which were currently in an Ofsted category, two of which had been issued Notice to Improve and one which had been judged to need special measures. She advised that over the last few years there had been a decline in the number of schools which had been going into an Ofsted category. Faira Ellks drew the committee's attention to the second part of the report which set out other low performing schools, which were not necessarily in an Ofsted category. She stated that whilst there were some areas of concern, overall the picture was positive.

Faira Ellks set out some of the factors which contributed to attainment being below average, such as high levels of social and economic disadvantage, weak leadership and not enough good teachers. She explained that the School Improvement Service regularly analysed the attainment and progress of pupils in each school, comparing these outcomes with Brent and national averages. She set out some of the actions which had been taken by the School Improvement Service to improve standards and concluded by referring to some of the actions which schools had taken to raise standards. Faira Ellks then introduced Sarah Bolt, the head teacher of Newfield Primary School, who was present to share with the committee her experience of what it was like to work in a school which had been given Notice to Improve and how the school had managed to drive forward improvement. She added that Notice to Improve had been lifted.

Sarah Bolt provided the committee with a handout which set out the key challenges the school faced and how they responded to these challenges. She drew the committee's attention to some of the general points which had been made in the briefing note and explained that she was happy to answer questions from members of the committee.

The committee congratulated Sarah Bolt and the rest of the staff on the excellent work which had been carried out to raise standards at Newfield Primary School. In response to a question regarding what the council could do to help Newfield Primary School to improve further, Sarah Bolt explained that additional funding and the introduction of a two-form entry system would be of great benefit to Newfield Primary School. Sarah Bolt explained that not only would a two-form entry help ensure that there would be more flexibility if one or two children did not do well in their results, but that it would also provide the school with the option to mix classes and would give the children the experience of mixing with a wider range of other children. The committee noted that it recognised the need for two forms of entry at

Newfield Primary School. Councillor Wharton pointed out that the borough was short of school places and that if Newfield Primary School was to become two-form entry, it would help to achieve the needs of that area. With regards to the funding, Sarah Bolt explained that the school had received funding last year, from London Challenge, which had helped towards the provision of one-to-one tuition for the pupils, but that this had been taken away once the school had improved.

In response to a query regarding homework clubs, Sarah Bolt stated that Newfield Primary School had a free homework club which pupils could attend to gain support with their homework. She also advised that there was a lunchtime ICT club and an after school club which had to be paid for by parents. She added that some children also had booster sessions. Sarah Bolt advised that the school was also planning to hold a session for parents where they could come to visit the classroom to discuss with the teachers what their children had been learning. In responding to a question regarding sharing best practice with other schools, Sarah Bolt explained that the head teachers in the area did talk regularly to share ideas and that she had found this to be very useful. She stated that the sharing of best practice was also able to take place at the Harlesden cluster meetings, which were for head teachers in the area. She added that the mentor she had, when she first became a head teacher, was also useful.

It was noted that the work around community cohesion and the recognition of other cultures had played a large role in raising standards. In answering a question regarding the large amount of new arrivals that the school experienced each year, Sarah Bolt explained that there was a temporary housing estate situated near the school which a number of the children came from. She added that due to the nature of the housing estate, families could get rehoused at any time. Following a question regarding the development of the health and wellbeing of staff, Sarah Bolt informed the committee that all the staff at the school were part of the wellbeing programme which provided free access to counselling and support. She added that the staff also had wellbeing targets to meet, such as having to leave the building by a certain time.

The Chair thanked Sarah Bolt for her presentation and asked members if they had any questions for Faira Ellks regarding the 'supporting schools to succeed' report. A concern was raised by a representative from the Teachers' Panel regarding paragraph 3.22 of the report, which stressed the need to ensure that all staff were held accountable for the outcomes achieved by pupils. In response, Faira Ellks stated that it was not about punishing staff, but was about creating an atmosphere which enabled open dialogue to take place between head teachers and class teachers regarding pupils' progress. Another representative of the Teachers' Panel raised a concern regarding the performance of academies in paragraph 3.24 of the report and that the local authority would be limited in what it could do to influence the outcomes of academies. In response, Councillor Wharton explained that two of the academies mentioned only became academies last year and that they became academies because the schools were failing. In answering a question regarding the two secondary schools which had been given a Notice to Improve due to the failure to meet safeguarding arrangements, Faira Ellks advised that Her Majesty's Inspectorate had found that these schools were making good progress in this area.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the improvement made by a number of low performing schools be noted;
- (ii) that action taken by schools and the School Improvement Service to secure improvements be noted.

7. Tackling homophobic bullying in schools

Anthony Felsenstein (Strategic Co-ordinator for Behaviour and Attendance) introduced the report which provided the committee with details on how homophobic bullying in schools was being tackled in Brent. He informed the committee that since producing the report, in recognition of LGBT History Month, a workshop on tackling homophobic bullying had been held on the 9 February 2010. He advised that an encouraging number of pupils had attended the workshop. He stated that the workshop had a number of speakers, including a representative from Stonewall, Mosaic LGBT Youth Centre, Brent Youth Parliament and Schools OUT. The main part of the meeting, he explained, provided five schools with the opportunity to share their work with each other on how they were tackling homophobic bullying. He added that pupils had taken the lead in two of the schools which attended the workshop. Anthony Felsenstein informed the committee that a local newspaper was interested in doing an article on the workshop which would cover some of the good work that was highlighted at the workshop. He added that Sue Sanders from Schools OUT had informed him that she was very impressed with the work which had been carried out and that she would like to put a case study together based on this.

Anthony Felsenstein explained that since the last time he reported to the committee, the council had updated its anti-bullying guidance, which had been put on the schools extranet. He stated that the School Improvement Service was currently in the process of collecting more data from schools to find out if there had been an increase in the number of schools which had made reference to tackling homophobic bullying in their anti-bullying policies. Anthony Felsenstein explained that the council would continue to build on the work already being carried out to tackle homophobic bullying and would continue to work with schools to ensure the sharing of good practice.

In the discussion which followed, Anthony Felsenstein explained that when teachers were unsure as to how to deal with homophobic bullying or they required support, it was helpful for them to have a section on homophobic bullying in their school's anti-bullying policy, as it provided them with guidance as to what they should do. In response to a question regarding the celebration of LGBT History Month in schools, Anthony Felsenstein explained that there was one school which did something specific to celebrate the month.

Responding to a question regarding governor training on how to tackle homophobic bullying, Anthony Felsenstein explained that governors did receive anti-bullying training, but that presently there were not usually separate sessions held for just tackling homophobic bullying. In answer to a question regarding whether there had been any resistance from schools in incorporating the tackling of homophobic bullying into their anti-bullying policies, Anthony Felsenstein stated that there had been no resistance but that some schools had stated that they did not separate out

different kinds of bullying in their anti-bullying policy as they viewed all forms of bullying as unacceptable no matter what the type. He informed the committee that the Government currently had a consultation out which was looking at whether, from September 2010, all schools should be required to not only record serious incidents of bullying, but to also record the type of bullying which had taken place. The Chair noted the importance of ensuring that all the good work, which had taken place so far, was continued to be built upon. The committee requested that an update, on the progress of tackling homophobic bullying in schools, be provided to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee in a year's time.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the update be noted;
- (ii) that an update, on the progress of tackling homophobic bullying in schools, be provided to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee in a year's time.

8. **School Status and Diversity in Brent**

Mustafa Salih (Assistant Director of Finance and Resources, Children and Families) introduced the report which provided the committee with the following areas of information; demographics, types of schools in Brent, Brent's admission policies, governing bodies, including details on training and accountability, and school funding. The Chair reminded the meeting that one of the reasons as to why this information had been requested was as a result of the allegations of misconduct at Copland Community School. Mustafa Salih drew the committee's attention to the appendices of the report, which provided information on the learning and development programme for governors in Brent. He advised that it was a very comprehensive package, which had the full support of the schools in Brent.

Responding to a question regarding what systems were in place to ensure that what happened at Copland Community School would not happen again, Mustafa Salih explained that the council's internal Audit and Investigations Service would now be auditing all schools. This would be in addition to any internal audit that schools may wish to conduct. The committee stressed the importance of ensuring transparency in the appointment of the new head teacher at Copland Community School.

Following the Supreme Court's decision to rule against the admissions policy of JFS, Councillor J Moher requested that a report be submitted to the committee, setting out the council's policy regarding admissions to voluntary aided schools, governor training on admissions criteria and how the council had responded to the judgement of the ruling against JFS. The committee agreed to this request.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that a report be submitted to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, setting out the council's policy regarding admissions to

voluntary aided schools, governor training on admissions criteria and how the council had responded to the judgement of the ruling against JFS.

Councillor Mistry declared an interest during this item with regards to the discussion on Copland Community School as she was an employee of Copland Community School.

9. **Transforming Learning in Brent (BSF)**

Mustafa Salih (Assistant Director of Finance and Resources, Children and Families) introduced the report which provided the committee with an update on the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) Programme and the next steps in the process. He explained that an important Remit meeting with Partnership for Schools would be taking place on the 2 March 2010, which would set out Partnerships for School's expectations in relation to the outputs and outcomes of the programme. Mustafa Salih advised that the council had agreed to the first phase of the programme which involved four schools. He explained that beyond the first phase, it was difficult to plan any further ahead as it was not known how much funding would be available at that stage.

Mustafa Salih informed the committee that one of the key requirements of the BSF programme was that the council would have to form a stand-alone company called a Local Education Partnership (LEP) which would be commissioned to undertake all the design and construction work. He explained that the majority share holder of the LEP would be the successful consortium that won the competitive dialogue process, with the council and Partnership for Schools holding a minority of shares. He stated that the council was currently looking at the possibility of forming a joint LEP with Barnet and Enfield Council. He stated that the advantages of a joint LEP were that it could result in significant savings in procurement costs, estimated at around £1m, and a significant saving in delivery time. The joint arrangements, he explained, could mean that the programme was delivered a year earlier than planned, due to the other authorities being further ahead in the process. He stated that a report would be going to the Executive for decision.

In the discussion which followed, the importance of keeping the committee informed of the arrangements for the consortium was noted. Following a request for more information on which companies may bid, Mustafa Salih explained that on the Partnership for Schools' website was a list of private sector organisations, which were already in the BSF project supplies chain. A concern was raised regarding the current economic climate and whether there would be enough money available, for the next stage, so as to not disappoint some schools.

The committee requested that more information on the proposed joint Local Authority partnership arrangements and what it would mean for the timescales of the project be included in the update report, which was being produced for the next Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March.

RESOLVED:-

that information on the proposed joint Local Authority partnership arrangements and what it would mean for the timescales of the project be included in the update report to the next Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

10. **Special educational needs: place planning and financial overview**

Rik Boxer (Assistant Director of Achievement and Inclusion) introduced the report which provided the committee with an overview of SEN expenditure, an analysis of current and projected demand for SEN and an outline of future plans to meet increasing demand, with reference to the Building Schools for Future 'Strategy for Change'. He began by providing the committee with a financial overview, explaining that the budgets for SEN were contained both within the Dedicated Schools Grant and local authority central budgets. Rik Boxer referred to the increasing amount of pressure on SEN placement budgets. He explained that this was due to a combination of factors which were listed in the report.

Rik Boxer drew the committee's attention to the section of the report regarding current provision for meeting special educational needs. He stated that one of the biggest issues which needed to be addressed as a priority, in terms of costs and numbers, was the placement of children with autism across the spectrum of needs. He explained that whilst provision for children with autistic spectrum condition had been expanded over recent years, there was an excess of demand over the number of local places available. He also advised that there were few surplus places in Brent's special schools.

Rik Boxer then highlighted some of the figures shown in the report which related to projection of future demand. This was based on the best assumptions and that there was a possibility that the demographic could change unexpectedly. He stated that current planning assumptions were that Brent would need to increase its capacity for specialist placements in Brent, either in special schools or additionally resourced mainstream schools, by 30% over the next 10 years in order to meet increasing demand. He then set out some of the principles which would underpin future place planning. By 2020, Brent expected all pupils with moderate learning difficulties to attend their local mainstream school with tailored support. Rik Boxer concluded by setting out some of the plans that were in place to improve provision and meet additional demand. This included the fact that under the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) proposals, all Brent secondary schools would have a SEN 'Centre of Excellence', which would be a specialist resource that would provide for a wide range of needs.

In response to a question regarding how much the BSF proposals, which related to SEN provision, were linked with the first phase of the programme, Rik Boxer explained that whilst it was phased implementation, the proposals were significantly linked as four secondary schools would be getting 'Centres of Excellence' as part of the first stage. In response to a concern raised by a representative of the Teachers' Panel, regarding the funding formula for specialist schools, Rik Boxer stated that the funding and banding system would be reviewed on a yearly basis. In response to a question from the representative regarding why it was not possible for Hay Lane and Grove Park to be co-located with a mainstream secondary school, Rik Boxer stated that there was no other feasible alternative. He advised that Hay Lane and Grove Park were close to Kingsbury High School and that the decanting of pupils was a possibility which could be looked at. In responding to a query regarding the expectation that by 2020 all pupils with physical and medical needs, excluding those with severe, profound or multiple learning difficulties, would

be included in an additionally resourced mainstream school, Rik Boxer stressed the importance of PCT input.

Following a query regarding what progress had been made to establish an alternative commissioning model, Rik Boxer explained that he was still awaiting the final report from the Brent Excellence Support Team regarding the SEN Improvement and Efficiency review. He added that he believed that the joining up of education and social care arrangements was still the best option. He stated that there was some work being carried out pan London which was looking at getting independent providers to limit fee increases. He added that he hoped the final recommendations from the review would be ready within the next six months. The Chair requested that the final findings and recommendations be submitted to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee once complete.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the increasing demand for SEN placements and consequent budgetary pressures be noted;
- (ii) that the comments regarding the plans for expanding and improving SEN provision in Brent be noted;
- (iii) that the final findings and recommendations of the SEN Improvement and Efficiency review be presented to the committee once completed.

11. **School Places**

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member for Children and Families) introduced a briefing paper that was circulated at the meeting, which provided the committee with an update on the sufficiency of primary and secondary school places. As part of an update on the situation at primary school level, he stated that the pressure on reception places continued to be felt, with 39 reception aged children being without a place as of 12 Feb 2010. He explained that all 39 applicants had applied after the closing date for receipt of applications in 2009. He stated that officers were currently in discussion with a couple of schools to open up places in the Harlesden and Neasden area. Councillor Wharton advised that the situation for year 1 remained tight, with 32 year 1 children waiting for a place.

Councillor Wharton then drew the committee's attention to information in the briefing note regarding 11+ transfers for September 2010. He stated that as of 12 February 2010, 4170 applications had been received. He explained that whilst this seemed like a large number, some of the pupils would have applied to two boroughs. He reminded the committee that there would be more places available for September 2010 due to the opening of the Ark Academy. Councillor Wharton informed the committee that the number of children seeking in year admissions to secondary schools was higher this year than it had been for the last three years. This, he explained, was due to an increase in the number of children moving into Brent from other London boroughs and other parts of the UK and the increase in the number of new arrivals from overseas. The Chair pointed out that there was a report coming to the next Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee which would look at the issue of school places in more detail. It was agreed that this

report should include an update on how the £14.7m, which had been received from DCSF to create additional primary school places, was being spent.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the school places update be noted;
- (ii) the report on school places, due to be submitted to the next Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March, include information on how the £14.7m, which was received from DCSF to create additional primary school places, was being spent.

12. **Any other urgent business**

(i) *Former Scouts Hut, Coniston Gardens*

Councillor J Moher raised an item regarding the recent report which went to the Executive on the Former Scouts Hut Site in Coniston Gardens. He asked that a report be prepared, for the next Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny meeting, setting out the details of the basis on which the recent recommendation by the Director of Children and Families, as regards the former Scout Hut site attached to Oliver Goldsmith Primary School, was jointly recommended for sale with the Director of Finance. He requested that it included the circumstances in which it was permissible or appropriate for Children and Families officers to recommend the sale of land on or adjacent to school sites under delegated powers against the wishes of the school. He also asked that the report explain why it was decided that the site should be disposed of to a housing association to generate a capital receipt, rather than being retained for educational purposes and what enquiries were made with the Planning Department as to the appropriateness of this change of use.

The committee agreed to ask for the report, subject to the satisfaction of the Chair that it would be in the remit of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss that which had been requested.

RESOLVED:-

that a report be submitted, responding to the concerns raised by Councillor J Moher in relation the former Scout Hut site attached to Oliver Goldsmith Primary School, subject to the satisfaction of the Chair that it would be in the remit of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss that which had been requested.

(ii) *Schools Health & Safety Conference*

The committee were advised that the Schools Health & Safety Conference would be taking place at Wembley Stadium on 11 March 2010 and that they were welcome to attend.

13. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Thursday 25 March 2010.

The meeting closed at 9.55 pm

W.MOTLEY
Chair