



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 25 March 2010 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Motley (Chair), and Councillors Arnold, Mistry, C J Patel and Hirani, together with Mr C Akisanya (voting co-optee) and Mr R Lorenzato (voting co-optee) and Dr J Levison (non-voting co-optee)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Dunwell, Ms J Cooper (observer), Mrs L Gouldbourne (observer) and Ms C Jolinon (observer)

Apologies were received from Councillors J Moher, Tancred and Wharton.

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

None declared.

2. **Deputations**

None received.

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 February 2010 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. **Matters arising**

(i) *Item 5 – Early Years Single Funding Formula*

The Chair informed the Committee that it had not been possible to include information on early years places in the update on school places provided to the current meeting. This subject would be covered at a future meeting.

(ii) *Item 7 – Tackling homophobic bullying in schools*

The Chair reported good coverage in the local press of the Committee's work on tackling homophobic bullying. A campaign had been launched at Queens Park Community School, and similar groups were being established in other schools.

(iii) *Item 8 – School status and diversity in Brent*

The Committee agreed to discuss this matter under any other urgent business, in order to allow Councillors Moher and Wharton to participate.

(iv) *Item 12 – Other urgent business – former scout hut, Coniston Gardens*

The Committee agreed to discuss this matter under any other urgent business, in order to allow Councillors Moher and Wharton to participate.

(v) *Item 12 – Other urgent business – Schools Health & Safety Conference*

Ms Cooper (Teachers' Panel) reported that the schools health and safety conference had been a great success. A majority of Brent schools had attended, represented by a governor, headteacher and trade union safety representative. Ms Cooper thanked the Council for its support for the conference, which she believed would lead to improvements in schools.

5. Review of the impact of locality-based social care teams

Graham Genoni (Assistant Director, Social Care) presented the report and answered questions from members on progress made by the newly-established Locality Service in delivering the strategic priorities of the Children's Trust Board and national performance indicators. Graham Genoni reported that the delivery of social care services had been restructured in January 2009 with a view to delivering services directly to five localities. The intention was to make services more accessible to local families, with stronger links to other agencies. In the beginning the staffing situation had been weak. For example, only around 45% of staff were permanent. However, this had increased to 83%, and the teams were working well together. Dedicated services for looked after children had also moved to the localities. Early intervention teams would eventually move in with the social work teams. Turning to performance over the period, Graham Genoni pointed out that significant improvements had been made to the timeliness of assessments and work delivery. However, there had been a 19% increase in child protection referrals in the previous two years, and a large increase in applications to the courts. In December 2009 the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was higher than it had been for over 10 years.

Answering questions from members, Graham Genoni reported that the Kilburn and Willesden teams both worked from the same premises in Kilburn, while premises were sought in Willesden. The Harlesden team was based in central Wembley, but would be moving to Harlesden High Street. The Kingsbury team was also based in Wembley, but would eventually move to a building project attached to Kingsbury High School. The Wembley team was based in central Wembley and would eventually move to the new Civic Centre. All five teams would be in their localities by the end of 2010. The distribution of staff was not even, as it related to the differing levels of need in the localities. Robust management ratios were in place in order to manage effectively, as well as to support and train newly-qualified social workers. An event had been organised with staff at the end of 2009 to discuss and evaluate progress.

Graham Genoni agreed to write to the Committee with the outcome of an analysis of child protection re-referrals in the light of possible recording errors. He also agreed to produce a brief report on progress of the relevant performance indicators following a review.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that the Committee be informed of the outcome of an analysis of child protection re-referrals;
- (iii) that a brief report be prepared on the progress of the relevant performance indicators following a review.

6. Long-term projections on school places in Brent

Rajesh Sinha (Department of Children & Families) introduced the report and answered questions from members on issues relating to long-term projections relating to school places in Brent. Rajesh Sinha reported that, in addition to receiving GLA projections, Brent now organised its own, partly in response to the recommendation from Partnership for Schools relating to the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) project. A shortfall of around 22 primary and 26 secondary forms of entry was currently forecast for September 2018, and this would be monitored annually. Changes in migration and house-building would affect the accuracy of the projections. A total of 901 sixth-form places would be provided, as well as an additional 180 SEN places in the next 10 years.

Asked about the prospect of a new secondary school, Rajesh Sinha reported that the Council needed to balance the need for land for primary schools and the longer-term need of the secondary sector. Answering a question on how this related to the BSF project, Mustafa Salih (Assistant Director, Finance & Performance) reported that the first phase of the project was the expansion of four schools, but that the second phase might contain the option of a new school, assuming BSF continued. The Committee noted the need for a new secondary school in the centre and south of the borough. In response to a question about surplus capacity in Year 7, Mustafa Salih reported that, while the long-term plan was for expansion, an option could be investigated of adjusting the funding formula to provide transitional protection for any schools with surplus places.

Responding to a question about all-through primary and secondary schools, Mustafa Salih reported that these were favoured by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The advantages were believed to be the same ethos throughout and good preparation for transition. Brent did not have a set view on this, but would work with schools who favoured the model of all-through education. The ARK Academy and Alperton Community School were committed to this, and other schools were exploring the possibilities. The Committee agreed that all-through education was an issue worth discussing on a theoretical basis.

In response to a question on whether new buildings took account of the needs of hearing-impaired children, Mustafa Salih informed the Committee that the Council's SEN strategy would inform and be incorporated into the BSF programme.

Asked about the process of expanding schools, Mustafa Salih reported that the Council worked with schools to explore the possibilities of expansion, inviting schools to consider this and commissioning feasibility studies. Currently nine schools had undergone such studies, and the options were being explored. As part of the BSF programme 14-19 provision was being explored in conjunction with the further education college, with joint provision being explored between some schools and the college.

Asked about the factors under review to provide flexibility in the methodology over a long period of time, Rajesh Sinha reported that the GLA was working on a pan-London scenario with a view to analysing demand in the longer term and identifying saturation points.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that the possibility of a new secondary school in the centre or south of the borough be kept under consideration by this Committee.

7. School places in Brent

Mustafa Salih (Assistant Director, Finance & Performance) updated the Committee and tabled a brief report setting out the number of children out of school between October 2009 and March 2010, as well as the progress of applications for school places in 2010/11. Mustafa Salih pointed to significant pressure on school places, with 60 reception age children currently without places. Offers had been made to all 60, but had been declined, mainly because of the location of the schools offered. The situation remained constant over the period since October 2009, particularly in view of the fact that new pupils had arrived in the borough since then. The Council had resorted to extreme measures to find places. For example, it was now looking to children's centres to take reception age children, and at linking children's centres and schools. The prospects were that two or three extra classes would be needed for September 2010 in view of the number of applications being received. The admissions process for secondary schools was at the second stage, and currently only Cardinal Hinsley and Crest Boys' Academy had vacancies. Extra places were needed currently and for the future.

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted.

8. Building Schools for the Future (BSF)

Mustafa Salih (Assistant Director, Finance & Performance) updated the Committee and tabled a brief report on the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. He was pleased to report that, since the previous update, Brent had been officially launched onto the BSF programme. Discussions had then taken place on setting up a joint Local Education Partnership (LEP) with Barnet and Enfield, but this had not come to fruition, partly because of the differing stages reached by the three

authorities. While a joint LEP would have delivered a substantial saving in costs, the project would still go ahead, with Brent exploring possibilities with other authorities and, if necessary, taking the project forward as a single LEP.

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted.

9. **Four-year review of the work of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Stella Akintan (Policy and Performance Officer) introduced a review of the work of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee from 2006 to 2010 and invited comments and suggestions for future work. Stella Akintan pointed to the good work of the task groups, and she informed the Committee that its work on tackling homophobic bullying would be submitted for an award to the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

The Chair informed the Committee that he was keen to continue to hold at least one meeting a year at a community venue in order to involve the public more and encourage participation.

Discussing highlights of the work of the Committee, the Chair drew attention to the fact that Priyesh Patel, who had attended the previous meeting as a representative of Brent Youth Parliament (BYP), was the youngest person ever to attend a Council committee in an official capacity, and Mrs Gouldbourne (Teachers' Panel) praised the way the Council had involved the BYP in general. Mrs Gouldbourne also thanked Mustafa Salih (Assistant Director, Finance & Performance) for all the work he and his team were doing on the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) project. Councillor Mistry thanked the officers who had worked on the task groups, pointing out that the Committee's report on safety outside the school gates had been received well at the Council's Executive.

The Chair thanked all the officers involved in the work of the Committee, and members agreed a particular vote of thanks to Stella Akintan.

On behalf of the co-opted members and observers, Dr Levison thanked the Chair for his calm, good-humoured and efficient chairing over the four-year period.

RESOLVED:

that the report and members' comments be noted.

10. **Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the date of the next meeting of the Committee would be confirmed by Council in May 2010.

11. **Other urgent business**

11.1 **Other urgent business - school status and diversity in Brent**

Mustafa Salih (Assistant Director, Finance and Resources) circulated a brief report setting out the implications for the Council of the Supreme Court ruling against the admissions policy of the Jewish Free School (JFS). While the Council did not set admissions policies for faith schools, it had ensured that the relevant schools had reworded their policies in accordance with the Supreme Court ruling. It would also monitor future admission policies and oversubscription criteria in order to ensure compliance with the judgement.

11.2 **Other urgent business - former scout hut, Coniston Gardens**

In response to concerns raised at the previous meeting about plans for the Council to sell the site of the former scout hut in Coniston Gardens, Fiona Alderman (Principal Lawyer, Social Services and Education) advised the Committee that it did not have a remit to consider specific decisions outside the call-in procedure. It would therefore not be appropriate to present a report on the sale of the particular site, although the Committee could scrutinise any relevant broader issue of policy.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm

W. MOTLEY
Chair