



MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday 17 July 2013 at 7.00 pm

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

Also present: Councillors Chohan and Pavey

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Matthews, Al-Ebadi, CJ Patel, Ms E Points and Ms C Jolinon.

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Deputations (if any)

None

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 18 June 2013

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2013 be approved as a correct record.

4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Dental Health Presentation

The committee received a presentation from Imran Choudhury (Acting Director of Public Health) providing an overview on plans for improving oral health in Brent. The oral health of children under 5 years old had been identified as a key issue for Brent via the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and this was reflected in Brent's Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The most recent survey, covering the period 2007 to 2008, found that five year olds in Brent had the worst oral health in England; 44 per cent had tooth decay and the incidence of treatment was below the national average. The significance of poor oral health in children was emphasised; it was a common cause of school absence and hospital admission for children and was an indicator of poor oral health in adulthood. A Brent Oral Health Plan was currently being developed which would fit in with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The Plan would include various measures to increase earlier exposure to regular brushing with fluoride toothpaste, enhanced working with the local dental

community, and training of all frontline staff to encourage best practice. Use would also be made of two posts created as part of the transition of public health to the council which focussed on early years and schools respectively. Imran Choudhury concluded by noting that it would be important to have long-term political support to address this issue.

Several queries were raised by the committee in the subsequent discussion. Further details were sought of the Brent Oral Health Plan and further comment requested on the reasons for Brent's high incidence of poor oral health in children. It was queried whether the water in Brent was fluoride treated. The committee also noted that the two public health posts referred to were currently fixed term positions and queried whether there was a commitment for these to be extended or made permanent posts. Members emphasised the importance of ensuring that hard to reach groups and communities were considered, noting that information should be provided in a variety of languages and that schools for children with disabilities should be targeted. It was recognised that this would have a cost implication but members noted the value of such preventative work in tackling the issue. It was further noted that preventative action should be key to Brent's response and that links with Children's Centres, the Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) Sector and to existing campaigns such as those on nutrition, should be key to the implementation of the Brent Oral Health Plan.

In response to the queries raised, Imran Choudhury noted that the water in Brent was not treated with fluoride and advised that there were a number of well known factors which contributed to poor oral health in children; these included poor diet and a lack of regular brushing. Poverty and a highly transient population were also highlighted as key factors. Whilst other boroughs had similar drivers, the impact of these were often successfully mitigated by good oral health promotion programmes. It was anticipated that the Brent Oral Health Plan would be completed by September 2013. Imran Choudhury agreed that it was essential that the proposed interventions fed into the existing work that was taking place across the council and its partners. With regard to the two public health posts, it would be desirable for these to continue but a decision had been taken to review the viability of the posts towards the end of the financial year. Members requested that an update be provided on these posts in due course.

A member of the public, speaking as both a school governor and local dental practice owner, explained that at present due to location-specific budgets, it was not possible for NHS dentists to carry out dental checks in schools. He further explained that in his experience, language barriers and ignorance of the facilities that could be accessed free of charge, were both key difficulties.

RESOLVED:

- i. that the presentation be noted;
- ii. that the proposal that the NHS make such changes as required to facilitate and enable NHS dentists to carry out dental checks within schools be put to the Brent Health and Wellbeing Board and Clinical Commissioning Group.

6. Local Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report

The Annual Report of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) for 2012/13 was introduced to the committee by Chris Spencer (Independent Chair of the LSCB), who had joined the Board in May 2012. Shortly after this time, the Board had been restructured, creating an Executive group. A new constitution had also been developed and the Board's three year business plan had been revised and agreed by LSCB partners in September 2012. Five sub-groups had been created, each Chaired by members of the Executive group, all of which had been fully operational as of January 2013. The Annual Report 2012/13 reviewed the progress made against year 1 of the business plan, assessing the Board's priorities as addressed via the sub-groups. The five sub-groups comprised Quality Audit and Outcomes, Vulnerable Groups, the Voice of the Child, Developing a Learning Culture, and Governance, Accountability and Business Processes. Terms of reference and support plans had been established for each of these. Chris Spencer emphasised that though the changes made had allowed significant progress to be achieved, there remained lots of work to do over the next few years.

During members' discussion, a number of issues and queries were raised. With reference to the Voice of the Child sub group, which had been set up to ensure that views of children and young people informed the Board in considering safeguarding, it was queried whether any young people sat on the Board. Further details were also sought on attendance at the LSCB meetings by various partners and it was specifically queried whether poor attendance by some organisations had hindered the progress of the Board. It was noted that the covering report stated that there were no child poverty implications and it was requested that this be revised to highlight some of the key issues.

Chris Spencer explained that there were no children on the LSCB but that there was a stated intention to establish a shadow board which children would attend. It was considered that as the meetings of the LSCB were rather technical it would not be an appropriate form of engagement to have children attend these. The Brent Youth Parliament were, however, currently involved with the Voice of the Child sub group. A key aim was to engage some of the vulnerable and hard to reach groups. One potential means of achieving this would be to utilise, train and possibly employ via the young apprenticeship scheme, young people who were or who had been part of the desired demographic. The most important aspect to good engagement would be demonstrating that the Board had listened to and used the views of young people in developing and improving practice. It was considered that the Board would play an important co-ordinating role around services for vulnerable groups to obtain better outcomes.

Further commenting on the role of the LSCB, Chris Spencer explained that the Board also undertook audit work to ensure that the services provided by its constituent organisations were underpinned by safe practice and acted to minimise risk. An audit report reviewing the outcome of this work would be submitted to the Board. With regard to the impact of poor attendance on the work of the LSCB, the committee was advised that some partners had a statutory duty to attend meetings whilst others attended on a voluntary basis. It was not expected that representatives from very specialised services would attend unless there was a relevant item being considered. Certainly, however, the attendance and turnover of the individual representatives of some of the key partners such as Health and the Police, had been negatively affected by the multitude of changes happening in their

respective sectors. As Chair of the LSCB, Chris Spencer explained that he did have the power to issue a formal challenge to some statutory partners for poor attendance.

Responding to the query on the child poverty implications of the report, Chris Spencer highlighted that comment could be made by an officer of the council on the relevant links between the work of the LSCB and other key strategies.

RESOLVED:

- i. that the Annual Report of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board for 2012/13 be noted
- ii. that a report setting out the findings of the audit work of the LSCB be submitted to the committee in due course.
- iii. That the child poverty implications of the report be submitted to the next meeting of the committee.

7. Brent Youth Parliament update

Thivya Jeyashanker (Chair of the Brent Youth Parliament [BYP]) provided an update to the committee on the recent work undertaken by BYP. An event had recently been held on Thursday 11 July 2013 for the UK Youth Parliament Curriculum for Life Campaign. BYP was a strong supporter of this campaign which sought an overhaul of the curriculum via a youth-led UK wide review to enable subjects such as financial and political literacy to be included. The event had been very successful with approximately 100 people attending from over 6 different schools. Similarly, a lot of work was currently being undertaken to maintain the momentum arising out of the success of the recent Eton Challenge. The young people involved had been very active in maintaining links with each other via social media and many of them had joined various youth committees. It was hoped that a number of them would engage further with BYP, elections for which would be held in October 2013. These elections would draw new members from secondary schools, primary schools, youth groups and other youth organisations across the borough.

The committee was further advised that Brent In Summer (BIS) had been re-launched successfully. BIS aimed to create a seamless service for children and young people aged 5 to 19 years old, bringing together Brent Council's sports, library and youth activities into one summer programme. A smaller special needs programme was also provided.

Up coming events included the provision of training to assist in the establishment of school based anti-bullying councils. This training was being offered by the Brent Anti Bullying Council in conjunction with Mosaic. 20 young people would be trained, who in turn would be able to train other young people. The next BYP session would be held on 20 July 2013 to which all councillors were invited and their attendance encouraged. It was also queried whether any councillors might wish to go into schools to give presentations on their role. The Chair confirmed that this proposal would be forwarded to all councillors and it was suggested that thought also be given to councillors and union members offering young people the opportunity to shadow them for a period.

In concluding, Thivya Jeyashanker raised a concern regarding the support available to the BYP. There had been a number of recent personnel changes and it was considered that this had and would continue to negatively impact the ability to maintain representation on BYP of hard to reach and vulnerable groups of young people. There were currently two BYP members with special educational needs. The committee sought comment on these concerns. Councillor Pavey (Lead Member for children and Families) advised that the support post recently vacated would be filled; it was unlikely however, that additional resources would be able to be provided due to financial constraints.

Members congratulated the officers on the successes relating to the Eton Challenge and launch of the BIS programme.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

8. Special Educational Needs (SEN) progress since 2011

Sara Williams (Acting Director of Children and Families) presented a report to the committee setting out the improvement made since 2011 to the council's Special Educational Needs (SEN) Service. This progress had been achieved via a One Council project which was scheduled for completion by the end of August 2013. Members were reminded that as part of this project, the council had formulated a new Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) strategy which had been considered by the committee previously.

Sara Williams explained that the One Council Project had supported the service to achieve a number of significant improvements. The reliance on statements of SEN for meeting need had been reduced. This enabled resources to be targeted at those with the greatest need and brought Brent more into line with practice in statistical and neighbouring authorities in West London. SEN provision within the borough had been increased to enable parents of children with SEN to access good and outstanding SEN provision closer to their homes. Importantly, this had prevented further increase in reliance on expensive independent and non maintained schools located outside of Brent. The financial performance of the service had also demonstrably improved with the recent years' trend of increasing Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) expenditure having been halted and the first years savings target as set out in the DSG recovery plan having been exceeded.

It was emphasised by Sara Williams that there remained significant challenges, however. The capacity of SEN provision in Brent would need to expand further to meet the projected demand by 2020 and it was acknowledged that Brent's population, and therefore demand on services, was expected to increase over the next five years. One of the greatest challenges facing the service, however, was the new SEN regime that was due to be implemented in September 2014. This would require all local authorities to undertake a radical re-think and transformation of their SEN processes and required closer working with Health and Social Care. It was essential that the challenges facing the service were systematically planned for and managed going forward and it was considered that the council was in a good

position to achieve these reforms, having developed the new Education, Health and Care department.

During the committee's discussion, clarification was sought regarding the obligation of the council to meet parental preference in allocating SEN school places. It was further queried how the additional capacity required in SEN provision would be achieved by 2020. Reference was made to the revised home to school transport policy which had been agreed by the Executive in April 2013. It was noted that the new policy was reported to place a focus on independent travel and it was queried how it would be determined which children could undertake independent travel.

In response to the queries raised, Sara Williams advised the committee that when a statement of SEN was produced, the school thought appropriate for that child would be named and this decision was ultimately made by the Local Authority. Past practice had been more flexible in meeting parent's preferences but now there was an enhanced focus on the local authority taking a clear and transparent stance. Where parents were unsatisfied with the choice made they could pursue the matter via a SEN tribunal. The council would continue to focus on expanding SEN provision within Brent. It was anticipated that use would be made of additionally resourced provision in Brent's secondary schools which was currently under-utilised. The council was also intending to relocate and expand Manor School. With regard to the transport policy, this had been based on the recognition that if children were able to travel independently, it would be in their interest to do so. However, the policy also recognised that it may be that some children would need support before they could become independent travellers. A careful assessment process would be undertaken to determine this.

Jenny Cooper (Observer) commented that the new Village school building was brilliant. She further highlighted that it was important to recognise that education also represented an opportunity to enrich pupil's lives and should not only be applauded for educational outcomes.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

9. School Places Update

An update on school places within the borough was provided to the committee by Sara Williams (Acting Director of Children and Families). As of 12 July 2013 there were 24 children who had not been offered a school place. These cases represented children who had moved into the borough very recently and there were presently approximately 50 new arrivals per week. There were places available for all 24 children and the school admissions service would be ensuring offers were made. There were also currently 205 children without school places but for whom offers had been made. These cases would be followed up and, if school places were not taken up, would be referred to the Education Welfare Team. At the present time there was particular pressure on school places in Reception and Year 1. Higher year groups had sufficient vacancies, though not always in the locations desired. With regard to the 2013/14 Secondary Transfer there were sufficient school places in Year 7. Rather, the pressure for the Secondary sector related to Years 9, 10 and 11.

In response to several queries, Sara Williams confirmed that there would be sufficient secondary school places for the 2014/15 academic year due to free schools opening up in the borough. This had meant that the council had been required to put off plans for expansion for the time-being. With regard to those cases where offers had been made and refused, it was considered that a principal reason for this was that they were on waiting lists for other schools.

RESOLVED

- i. That the update be noted.
- ii. That the next update include detail on the number of children not taking up a school place after more than six months.

10. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

RESOLVED

That the work programme be noted.

11. Date of next meeting

The committee noted that the next meeting would be held on 10 October 2013.

12. Any other urgent business

Councillor Gladbaum raised a concern that a great number of the borough's Children's Centres and nurseries had failed to achieve a good outcome in the latest inspection round. The importance of early years education was emphasised and it was proposed therefore, that an urgent report be presented to the committee analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the council's the early years service. Councillor Gladbaum added that staff participation and morale was paramount in effective service delivery.

RESOLVED:

That a report analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the council's early years service be submitted to the committee at its next meeting on 10 October 2013.

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm

Cllr W Mitchell Murray
Chair