

MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON MONDAY 26TH JUNE, 2023

PRESENT:

Councillors: Makbule Gunes (Chair), Anna Abela, Lotte Collett, Marsha Isilar-Gosling and Sue Jameson

Co-opted Members: Yvonne Denny and Lourdes Keever (Church representatives) and Amanda Bernard (Haringey SEND Parent Carer Forum)

28. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to agenda item 1 in respect of filming at this meeting. Members noted the information contained therein.

29. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mark Blake.

30. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

32. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

33. MINUTES

AGREED

That the minutes of the meeting of 23rd March 2023 be approved.

34. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP

AGREED:

That the following be noted:

1. The terms of reference and protocols for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Panels and non-voting co-opted Members on Scrutiny Panels; and
2. The policy areas/remits and membership for each Scrutiny Panel for 2023/24.

35. APPOINTMENT OF NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBER

AGREED:

That a representative from Haringey SEND Parent Carer Forum be appointed as a non-voting co-opted Member of the Panel for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

36. CABINET MEMBER QUESTIONS: CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

Councillor Zena Brabazon, the Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Families, reported on key developments within her portfolio. The two most significant ones were the recent Ofsted Inspection of children's social care and the Safety Valve programme, which were covered in detail elsewhere on the agenda for the meeting. There had been a Member development session on the Safety Valve programme. It was a large and very important programme, which could not afford to fail. The Council would need to work closely with schools and other partners to ensure its success.

A Get Haringey Talking programme to encourage the development of speech and language amongst children under 5 had been launched. She felt that the campaign was long overdue and also needed to be brought to the attention of the Integrated Care Board. She was aiming to secure additional funding for the borough for this.

An inspection of the Youth Justice Service was due in the next few months. She had recently attended an awayday for people in the service which had been very impressive and provided an insight into the very demanding work that the team undertook. The first of the borough's four Family Hubs was due to be launched on 28th June and the Panel were invited to attend this. The hubs were being funded by £3.8 million of government money and she was optimistic about their prospects. She was also due to attend conferences of Haringey Safeguarding Children's Board and Haringey Headteachers.

She had recently attended an away afternoon with Haringey Education Partnership (HEP). She noted that recent events had shown the benefits of schools remaining part of their local authority family of schools. There was a national issue that had been identified with school buildings that had been constructed in the 1970s using concrete. The government had asked for local investigations to take place of such buildings. The Council had been able to provide support quickly for schools in the borough that had been affected.

The Chair congratulated the Cabinet Member and officers on the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection and moving the Council's social care services to a "good" rating. She also highlighted the Safety Valve programme to reduce the deficit in the high needs block. She asked what were the key challenges in responding to these two issues.

The Cabinet Member stated that there was an action plan that had been developed to respond to the recommendations of the inspection and, in particular, the area identified as requiring improvement. She felt that the inspection process had been fair and even handed. The areas highlighted by the inspection were no surprise. The Action Plan would be submitted to Ofsted and would show where attention would be focused. The service knew what was required to improve and move towards an “outstanding” rating. An Excellence Board would be established in September to provide challenge and this would be independently chaired. In respect of the Safety Valve, the biggest challenge would be to deliver all of the programmes on time and on budget. Families would also need to be supportive of the process. Education, Health and Care plans (EHCPs) were currently the gate keeper for the provision of support for children with SEND and the borough needed to be in a position where this was no longer the case. Schools had to find the first £6,000 to fund support as part of EHCPs and this was hard for schools with several children who had them. It was imperative that the programmes were delivered due to the financial implications. There was also an impact on the Council’s capital programme as residential accommodation needed to be provided if children were to be accommodated within the borough.

Panel Members expressed concern about the financial issues that were facing some schools in the borough arising from falling school rolls and, in particular, the impact that this might have on children with SEND. They felt that there was a need for discussion and collaboration between school governors. The Cabinet Member responded that meetings were starting to be held with governors and there was clarity regarding the challenges that were being faced. The issue of falling rolls was not unique to Haringey and was being faced by other London boroughs, some of which were amalgamating or closing schools. Consideration was being given by officers as to how schools in Haringey could be supported so that they were more sustainable. The issue had been developing for many years and was now starting to filter through to secondary schools. Loans could be provided to maintained schools in financial difficulties if need be, including diocesan schools.

Ann Graham, the Director of Children’s Services, stated that although there was some overlap with the Safety Valve programme, the budget challenges that schools were facing were principally a school place planning issue arising from the falling birth rate. Schools were experiencing a range of challenges from this and the Council was working with cluster groups of headteachers to provide support. In addition, external support had been provided from ISOS. Whilst other boroughs were closing or amalgamating schools, Haringey was seeking to avoid similar action. Chairs of school governors were leading on this matter though, with support from the Council.

A Panel Member commented that there needed to be clarity for parents and carers regarding how the local authority was planning to provide more speech and language therapy. The absence of this could lead to misinformation. The Cabinet Member responded that there was a need to ensure that the system was able to provide speech and language therapy at the earliest stage so that reliance on EHCPs could be avoided. In some local authorities, this was already in place. NHS services were the main providers and work was being undertaken to reconfigure provision so that parents would not need to battle to access it.

Panel Members highlighted the fact that a high proportion of children and young people with SEND did not just need speech and language therapy and had other support needs. EHCPs were not just about speech and language. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that this was the case. It was how that this was achieved that was the issue.

In answer to a question regarding the summer programme for children and young people, she stated that she was awaiting a briefing on the issue. She had every confidence though that a comprehensive programme would be put in place. In respect of the likely non-availability of Park Road pool for the summer, Ms Graham stated that it would not be possible to replace all of the pool sessions. However, there were pools available in other parts of the borough. The summer programme would be full of interesting activities and a large number of these would be free. Every child would be given a booklet of the summer programme events. The programme would also be on the Council's website. It was agreed that the package would be shared with the Panel when it became available.

AGREED:

That the borough's summer programme for children and young people be circulated to the Panel.

37. OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

Beverley Hendricks, Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Social Care, presented a report on the recent Ofsted inspection of children's social care. She highlighted the change of culture that had taken place, with staff now feeling confident of speaking to inspectors. In addition, there was now better retention of practitioners, which provided greater stability. She also highlighted the challenge of moving away from exporting children to other areas to building the Council's own in-borough provision. The draft post Ofsted Action Plan was included in the papers for the meeting and any comments on it would be very welcome.

In answer to a question, she stated that Independent Review Officers (IROs) had been established following national serious case reviews. Their role was to provide independent scrutiny and challenge in respect of the experience of looked after children (LACs). Although they were contracted to the local authority, they were treated as independent and managed at arm's length. There were currently 7 in Haringey. They had caseloads of around 60 children each. They undertook visits, met parents, carers and young people and raised any concerns with the Council. Life story work referred to a record of significant events from a child's life, which would typically be put together by parents for their children. These could be beneficial to a person's sense of belonging, especially those who had been separated from their families. There were psychologists within the Children's Social Care service who worked with social workers to support them in developing therapeutic life stories for LACs. There were two life story processes. There were life story books and home books, which were maintained by foster parents and had a diary format. These processes were built into standards for foster carers. The area of challenge was where there was a lack of stability in placements, which could include residential homes. There had also been issues with compliance. Children's commissioning had

recently been transferred back into the Children's Service and contracts had been reissued, including the requirement to undertake life story work. IROs were expected to check that it was taking place. There could be issues relating to life story books when children came into the care system at a late stage of their development as parents and carers could be very distressed and reluctant to pass on information. The inspection had picked up on the fact that more work was required on life stories.

In answer to another question, she stated that there was the aspiration to set up an Excellence Board so that the very best that could be provided for Haringey children should be provided. There was support across the service's senior management team, who shared the ambition, aspiration and vision. The aim was for excellence but they would settle for outstanding for children.

In answer to a question regarding siblings, Ms Hendricks stated that the service's current policy was weighted towards keeping them together. When the oldest of siblings placed together was nearing the age of 18, there would be negotiations with the foster carer. Young people could remain in a placement to up to 21 and beyond if agreed with the placement. Stability was aimed for. The service did its very best to keep siblings together but it could sometimes be very difficult. Where it was not possible to place them together, they aimed to maintain frequent, quality contact. Ms Graham commented that a lot of progress had been made since the introduction of the concept of corporate parenting in 1998, as part of the "Quality Protects" initiative. The body that monitored corporate parenting in Haringey was called the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee (CPAC). This had recently been reconfigured to facilitate greater Member involvement.

AGREED:

That an annual update on progress with the implementation of the Ofsted Action Plan be provided to the Panel.

38. SEND - EARLY INTERVENTION

Tim Miller, Head of Strategic Commissioning, presented an update on the SEND Transformation and the associated Written Statement of Action, as included in the agenda papers for the meeting.

Panel Members expressed concern at the waiting time for autism assessments for children between the ages of 12 and 18, which was 18 months. Secondary schools were more challenging places for children with autism, especially girls. In addition, many children might not appear to be autistic. Mr Miller reported that specific work was being undertaken with Open Door. The Language and Support Team had been of the view that there was a gap in therapeutic support for children in secondary schools and this was why Open Door had been commissioned. Support had been moved to a pre and post diagnostic model. The offer from Open Door was in addition to the support that was already provided by the Tavistock Clinic. A new clinical pathway was being developed for autism in the north central London area that recognised local differences but also adopted common principles. The aim was provide support when needs arose rather than waiting for a formal diagnosis and

supporting children and families as they progressed. A meeting would be taking place with NHS England to discuss how to bring the waiting list down.

In answer to a question regarding the use of privately funded assessments, Mr Miller stated that the NHS did not ask about the status of clinicians making assessments. Private diagnoses were used on a regular basis and the NHS itself also used private providers. However, GPs could be sensitive about the suitability of some providers, as could clinical teams. He would encourage any parents considering the option of a private diagnosis to talk the matter through with their GP. Ms Graham commented that, irrespective of the existence of a private diagnosis, there was still a process that needed to be gone through.

Ms Difolco presented an update on the Safety Valve programme. In answer to a question, she stated that there was commitment by the Council and its partners to bring about a shift in culture. The direction of travel was consistent with national trends. There were very good relationships with partners and support from them all for the programme. No change was not an option. Ms Graham commented that there would also be a whole systems change in addition to the cultural shift. In answer to a question on how teachers would be taught, she stated that work was taking place to improve support to schools and especially the workforce. One of the key projects was to improve the workforce development plan. The new plan was much more comprehensive and had been developed following consultation with stakeholders. It was due to start from September.

In answer to a question, Mary Jarrett (Head of Integrated SEND) reported that recruitment was taking place of Speech and Language Assistants. This was following a successful pilot that had taken place in Noel Park and was part of a system change that focused on early intervention and support. The Panel noted that the new posts were in addition to the posts that were already in the service. In answer to another question, she stated that speech and language therapy was only one of a number of projects included in the Safety Valve programme and which were aimed at meeting the needs of children and young people at the earliest possible age. There was another project that was intended to improve the social, emotional and mental health of young people and this was particularly relevant to those in secondary school. An update on progress with this could be provided to a future meeting. They were mindful of the needs of children with English as an additional language and were able to differentiate between children who were learning a new language and those who were struggling with both their first and second language. Children who were multi-lingual tended to do better academically than others but only after the age of 12.

AGREED:

That regular further updates on progress with the Safety Valve programme be provided to the Panel.

39. SCRUTINY REVIEW ON CHILD POVERTY - UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Jean Taylor, Head of Policy, provided an update on the implementation of the recommendations of the scrutiny review on child poverty. A response to them had

been provided by Cabinet in November 2022. Ongoing work was taking place to address the cost of living pressures, which were having a significant impact on residents. There was a disproportionate impact on children and young people and levels of child poverty were likely to be exacerbated. Work on a coordinated response by the Council to cost of living pressures had continued until recently. The pressures were likely to continue for the foreseeable future as a result of a range of factors. Work was taking place on how to re-frame the response for the longer term and, in particular, to identify the levers that were likely to have the greatest effect in mitigating the impact. In particular, consideration was being given to how to increase the life chances of young people and increase social mobility. The Haringey Community Gold project was continuing, with funding continuing until 2025 and work was taken place to embed the initiatives within it. The Mayor had made a commitment to fund universal free school meals for the next academic year and work was taken place with schools on what would happen following this.

In answer to a question regarding social mobility, she stated that work on this was at an early stage but there was an understanding of what the key levers were. Being able to access the best possible education, having a range of specific needs addressed and support on transitions were all important and could determine life chances. Access to opportunities outside of school were also important. Holidays schemes could provide access to opportunities to participate in activities in sport or the arts.

The Panel raised the issue of the identification of parents entitled to free school meals and the relationship with the pupil premium. The Cabinet Member reported that there was a Council free school meals working group which she belonged to and which had discussed this particular issue. The relevant form was currently being revised. In addition, the Council's admissions teams would be taking responsibility for this and would aim to obtain the national insurance number of parents. It was anticipated that this would enable a better result to be obtained.

In answer to a question regarding period poverty, the Panel noted that there had been discussions with schools regarding this and that a scheme to assist was being rolled out. Ms Hendricks agreed to circulate a briefing to the Panel on progress with this.

In answer to a question regarding clothing, the Cabinet Member reported that the Deborah Reiss Foundation provided a wide range of clothing for schools to distribute. This was allocated according to levels of child poverty.

The Chair thanked Ms Taylor for her report and presentation and asked that the Panel be kept informed of any relevant further developments.

AGREED:

That the Assistant Director of Safeguarding and Children's Social Care be requested to provide a briefing note to the Panel on the progress with work to alleviate period poverty.

40. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

It was noted that the next meeting of the Panel would be on 21st September and that the items for the meeting would be:

- Haringey Youth Justice Strategic Plan;
- Stop and Search; and
- Skills and Careers.

CHAIR: Councillor Makbule Gunes

Signed by Chair

Date