

MINUTES OF MEETING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON THURSDAY 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2021

PRESENT:

Councillors: Makbule Gunes (Chair), James Chiriyankandath, Sarah James and Tammy Palmer

13. FILMING AT MEETINGS

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

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Dixon and Ms Jakhu and Ms Jhunjhunwala.

15. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

17. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

18. MINUTES

In respect of item 8 and the reference to the inclusion of refugee and migrant support within the terms of reference, Panel Members queried where responsibility for the support of adults lay. Ann Graham, Director of Children's Services, reported that her department was only in a position to report on support for children. Councillor Zena Brabazon, Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children and Families stated that she was happy to provide an update on support provided for Afghan refugees, including that provided for both children and adults. The Panel suggested that one option would be for this to be an item on a future joint meeting of the Children and Young People's and the Adults and Health panels.

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of 20 July 2021 be approved.

19. FINANCIAL MONITORING

Josephine Lyseight, Head of Finance (People), reported on the current budgetary position of the Children's Service. There was currently a projected overspend of £5.82 million. £3 million of this was related to Covid expenditure. The key areas where pressures were being felt were Safeguarding and Social Care, which had an overspend of £4.1 million, and Prevention and Early Help, which had an overspend of £1.5 million.

The pressures in Safeguarding and Social Care were due to the increased number of placements and placement complexity, resulting in higher unit costs of care and increased staffing and legal costs. The pressures in Early Help and Prevention were due to Special Educational Needs (SEN) transport and anticipated income pressures in Nursery and Children's centres.

Work was taking place with the Commissioning Service to mitigate the rising costs of placements, which reflected a national supply and demand issue. Action included developing relationships with new providers and working to increase the capacity of the brokerage service to secure and negotiate placements at the best possible price.

In respect of SEN transport, the pressures arose from an increase in demand of 10%. In response to this, routes had been re-procured and this had reduced costs by 10%. There was also new route mapping software and action was being undertaken to reduce the number of costly out-of-borough placements.

In respect of the savings that were approved as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), all of these were currently forecast to be delivered. Mitigations would be put in place and replacement savings found in the event of this position changing.

As in Period 3, the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget was forecasting an in-year overspend of £6.58m. All of this originated from the High Needs Block (HNB) and the main reason for this remained the increasing number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP). Approximately 25% of looked after children now had an EHCP. A DSG Management Plan was being produced with various stakeholders and would also be shared with the DfE. Whilst Council actions would mitigate the level of overspend, it would not still not be sufficient to bring annual spend within allocated budgets. This was due to the significant difference between government funding and demand for services within the HNB.

John O'Keefe, Head of Finance (Capital, Place and Regeneration) reported that the Capital Programme had been reviewed and re-profiled so that the funds were still available for works to be carried out in future years. The funding for primary school repairs and maintenance had not been re-profiled though as the work that this covered was highly reactive in nature. The funding for this had been kept in the current budget so that the Corporate Landlord function could respond to demands as and when they arose. Secondary School modernisation and enhancement programme had also not been re-profiled due to uncertainty regarding the works that needed to be done. Funds for this had been retained in the budget so Project Managers could deliver on schemes as they became available. £5.1 million had been re-profiled into

future years, leaving a revised budget of £41.3 million. It was currently anticipated that £37.1 million of this would be spent but it was possible that external factors, such as supply of labour and materials, could affect spending on the modernisation and enhancement programme for primary schools.

In answer to a question, Ms Lyseight reported that the overspend in the General Fund was forecast to be £5.8 million. The deficit to the DSG was separate to this and outside of the balance sheet.

Panel Members noted that the current overspend was not just due to Covid expenditure and requested confirmation that factors behind the overspend would not be recurring and that current funding levels were sustainable. Ms Lyseight reported that Covid had impacted on all Council services. Some interim funding had been provided by the government to cover the additional costs but this had not been enough. It was unclear whether the additional demands for on the service would continue. Assumptions had been made within the budget projections in the MTFS and requests for growth had been made to mitigate overspends though. The Council wanted the government to fully fund the additional spending that had been required. It was hoped that the forthcoming spending review would provide fairer funding to cover the impact of Covid.

Ms Graham commented that the service had a “needs led” budget. When requests for support were made, the service was under an obligation to respond positively to them. In addition, unit costs had increased year-on-year. The service was therefore not in a position to control many of its costs. Placements in secure residential units could be particularly expensive, with the Council paying £16,000 per week for some of these. Although there were only small numbers of these, any increase could lead to significant budget pressures. The number of young people in residential accommodation had increased from 28 in 2017 to 55 this year. The budget pressures therefore came from both the number of placements and the unit costs.

In answer to a question, Ms Graham reported residential care homes had previously often been small family businesses but the market had become increasingly dominated by big companies, including private equity. In response to the increased unit costs, the Council was trying to establish its own facilities and working with housing services and other north central London boroughs to achieve this. In addition, the DfE was considering providing capital funding. However, this was a long term strategy. She stated that the secure estate had reduced in size to enable more care to take place in the community. There had been an increase in extra familial harm and children were presenting with increasingly complex needs.

In answer to another question regarding trends or patterns in respect of young people requiring residential care, Ms Graham stated that there were now more older young people and many of these had been subject to harm in the community. In addition, stresses within families and economic pressures were also a factor.

Councillor Brabazon, Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children and Families, reported that the current administration had been of the view that budgets for Children’s and Adult’s Services should reflect the reality of the financial demands placed upon them. As a result of this, the Children’s Service had benefitted from a

cash injection of £7 million in 2019 and this had helped to stabilise the service. The service was required to put the needs of children first and ensure that they were safe and in the right setting. The market for residential care was now dominated by large private companies. She hoped that there would be an opportunity to discuss collaboration with other boroughs through London Councils. The number of children requiring residential care was relatively small and the most cost effective solution would be to develop an effective consortium with other boroughs. In the meantime, housing officers had been asked to identify suitable properties in the borough. An additional budgetary pressure had been caused by the government outsourcing the costs of secure accommodation from the Ministry of Justice to local authorities. Such placements could be extremely expensive and the Council had no control over the cost. In respect of the DSG, the Council's position was no different to other local authorities. This has been exacerbated by the additional need to now fund some young people with special needs up to the age of 25 without any additional government funding.

Ms Graham commented that the issues relating to the HNB were of a national nature. A lot of work had been undertaken by the Council with other local authorities as well as individually to make the case to government regarding it but there had not been a positive response to it so far, although it had been indicated that it may be addressed in the forthcoming Spending Review. A "Safety Valve" had been introduced by the government for some local authorities but Haringey was not a recipient. Its position was not an outlier and the deficit was not as large as many other local authorities. Ms Lyseight stated that the "Safety Valve" carried a number of conditions so would not necessarily be of benefit. The Council was considering what could be done to mitigate the overspend but it was recognised that it would not be possible to keep within the current budget. The Cabinet Member commented that the Society of Local Government Treasurers had also raised their concerns regarding the issue with the government.

The Panel noted that where savings proposals were marked as "amber", this indicated that it was considered that there might be an element of risk in the delivery of the proposed saving.

20. SUPPORT TO REFUGEE AFGHAN CHILDREN

Charlotte Pomery, Assistant Director for Commissioning, reported on the assistance that was being provided for Afghan refugees by the Council and its partners. She reported that there were currently two schemes in operation:

- The Afghan Relocation and Assistance Programme, which was for households of individuals who had worked alongside British Forces; and
- The Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme, which was aimed at people most at risk from the new regime.

People on both schemes were given indefinite leave to remain and were also able to claim benefits as soon as they arrived. They also received the same package of support, which was funded by the Home Office. There were 12,000 refugees currently staying in bridging hotels and they were now all out of quarantine. Long term accommodation was now being sought. Haringey had pledged to take four families from each of the two schemes. There was a Haringey Welcome Advisory

Board of the Council and its partners, which aimed to coordinate support. There were currently no bridging hotels in Haringey and no refugees had yet been allocated to Haringey. The Council was working closely with the Home Office regarding the relocation process.

21. ANNUAL YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2021-2022

Jackie Difolco, Assistant Director – Early Help, Prevention and SEND, reported on the Annual Youth Justice Plan for 2021/22. It was the duty of each local authority to develop such a plan and it had already been approved by the Haringey Youth Justice Partnership Board and submitted to the national Youth Justice Board (YJB).

The Panel noted that the Youth Offending Service was subject to inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP). The most recent inspection had taken place in 2012 but the service had undergone a thematic inspection in May 2021 on the support and supervision provided for black and mixed heritage boys and young men. Haringey had been one of nine local authorities selected from across the country and one of three London boroughs. The inspection had taken place from the 17th to 21st May and involved interviews with staff, young people and partners as well as a review of cases. Findings from the inspection were expected to be published later in the year.

The plan covered what had happened in 2021 and what the service intended to do in 2022. In 2021, the cohort of young people who were supported by the service represented less than 1% of their local population. There had been 232 young people who had come into contact with the service, including 86 first time entrants and 10 who had received custodial sentences. The figures were lower than previous years but higher than the borough's family group of comparable authorities and neighbouring boroughs. There had been a 12% reduction in offending, which equated to 58 fewer offences.

Key priorities and outcomes were outlined in the Plan. Good progress had been achieved so far in respect of a number of priorities, although this may have been influenced by the ongoing impact of the Covid pandemic. There was a projected reduction of 6% in young people becoming first time entrants to the criminal justice system, equating to 81 young people. The reoffending rate had gone down to 24%, which was the lowest on record and below the target of 40%. There was also predicted to be a reduction of young in custody of 30% or 14 young people, compared with a target of 16 and 20 for the previous year.

The service was undertaking a more systemic approach to youth justice practice and adopting a "whole family" approach. A parents "Think Space" had been developed and they were currently looking at pathways within Family Support and Youth Services to provide a more joined up approach to family work and targeting the needs of siblings of young people who offended. Work was also taking place to develop a process for involving fathers or father figures of young people who offended. In addition, the service had been chosen for a pilot project that focused on its link with Alternative Provision and how young people could be supported better in getting back into mainstream education. The service was also represented on a newly formed education focus group looking at reducing exclusions of young people in Haringey.

In answer to a question, Ms Difulco reported that children and young people with SEND who were known to the Youth Offending Service were offered a range of interventions and assessments. Those with SEND who had not offended but were considered to be at risk were supported through targeted work by the Youth Service and Haringey Community Gold. In answer to another question, she stated that she would be happy to submit the report of the thematic inspection of the service to a future meeting of the Panel. In respect of disproportionality, the Partnership Board shared a range of data on trends and this included details of ethnicity. Robust action was already taking place to address the issue and this included highlighting diversity issues in youth court reports.

In answer to another question regarding unconscious bias training for magistrates, Ms Difulco agreed to check to see whether this had been provided. However, she could confirm that it had been provided for all staff in the Youth Offending Service and social workers in schools. In answer to a question regarding whether training could be extended to cover the impact of being a looked after child on offending, she agreed to consider this further and report back.

Panel Members commented that, whilst the report stated that black young people were over represented in the youth justice system, every other minority ethnic group was under represented. It was felt that socio-economic factors were a significant influence on offending levels and the drivers of disproportionality were more complex than they might appear to be.

AGREED:

1. That the report of the thematic inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation on the support and supervision provided for black and mixed heritage boys and young men by the Youth Offending Service be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel; and
2. That the Assistant Director (Early Help, Prevention and SEND) be requested to further information to the Panel on;
 - The provision of unconscious bias training for local magistrates; and
 - The extension of training for relevant professionals to cover the impact of being a looked after child on offending.

22. MISSING CHILDREN

Pauline Morris, Head of Service (SQIP), reported that safeguarding partners supported and had adopted the protocols relating to missing children, which had been reviewed earlier this year. Training on the updated protocol was taking place and included the actions supporting it. She outlined some of the achievements that had been made by the Council and its partners, which included:

- The development of a missing children app by Haringey Safeguarding Children's Partnership, which was a self-reporting tool and enabled young people to activate support from across the partnership and to request a return home interview;

- Widening the quarterly reporting from partners to provide analysis of key themes and issues in order to better understand child sexual and criminal exploitation; and
- Repurposing the Family Network meetings to provide opportunities for looked after children to develop their care plans and shape their contact arrangements safely.

She reported that there had been improvements in the following areas:

- Recording and compliance;
- Management of missing and high-risk cases, through the monthly Vulnerability, Violence and Exploitation Prevention Panel meetings;
- Monthly MACE meetings considered intelligence around the problem profiling victims, offenders, locations, and themes (VOLT); and
- The Virtual School lead for Haringey received daily data on missing children and is routinely invited to all missing strategies for looked after children.

Looked after children were most at risk from going missing. Children reported as missing were likely to be involved with “county lines” and local low level drug distribution. A disproportionate percentage of young people who were reported missing were from Black and Minority Ethnic communities. The number of looked after children reported missing remained highest amongst the 15 to 17 age group. Between April 2020 and March 2021, there were a total of 806 missing episodes reported, involving 190 children. The service were aware of the identities of the children who most frequently went missing and provided a range of support to them.

All children who went missing were offered a return home interview but not all took up the offer. Refusal was most common amongst older children. Amongst children living at home, either the parent or the child could refuse the offer. Return home interviews were only effective if follow up support was offered that addressed the reasons for them absconding. This may include a reassessment, initiating a team around the family, referral to a specialist service such as CAMHS or involvement of colleagues from the voluntary agencies. The needs and intervention plans of young people considered to be at highest risk were considered at the Edge of Care Panel. 56% of missing children were male and 44% female. The majority of children who went missing were absent for less than 24 hours.

In answer to a question, she stated that main reasons that young people returned after going missing was that they had accomplished the task that they had set out to do or that they had been won round by continued contact from the service. In answer to another question, she stated that some young people who went missing were known to the Youth Offending Service. In some cases, this was as a result of being stopped by the Police whilst missing and being found in possession of items that they should not have. As far as she was aware, no young people had gone missing from unregistered homes.

23. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Panel noted that the final report of the review on schools was currently being drafted. A meeting between the Chair and officers in the Children and Young People’s Service was in the process of being arranged to discuss the possible scope and terms of reference for the proposed review by the Panel on child poverty. Work on such a review would need to be completed quickly in order to ensure that it could

be approved by the end of the current administration. The scheduling of items for the remaining meetings for the year, including the agenda for the next meeting of the Panel, would be finalised following discussion between the Chair and relevant officers.

24. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR: Councillor Makbule Gunes

Signed by Chair

Date