

MINUTES OF MEETING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON THURSDAY 18TH NOVEMBER 2021

PRESENT:

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

Co-opted Members: Yvonne Denny and Lourdes Keever (Church representatives) and Anita Jakhu (Parent Governor representative)

25. FILMING AT MEETINGS

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

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Jhunjhunwala (parent governor representative).

27. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

29. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

The Panel received a deputation regarding the recent joint OFSTED/Care Quality Commission (CQC) area inspection of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) services. Amanda Bernard spoke on behalf of the deputation. She stated that parents and carers wished to have their say on the response to the joint inspection. They were often asked what they co-production meant to them but they did not think the onus should just be on parent and carers to respond. They had always wanted to work jointly and in co-production with the Council. They felt that they had been heard but not listened to. Parents and carers met frequently with officers who were referred to as professionals but they were also professionals in caring for their children. Only seventy days had been allowed to prepare a plan to resolve long standing issues in response to the joint inspection. The adversarial culture that existed had come about in response to the manner in which parents and carers had been treated. Although there had been some advocates for them within the Council, they had proven to be ineffectual.

SEND covered a wide range of different children and young people but the outcomes of consultations were normally based only on the views of the people who had responded first on-line. Some parents and carers did not have access to the internet though and were therefore unable to respond. Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans covered a range of interdependent issues. Attention also needed to be given to what happened when young people transitioned to adult services.

The joint inspection had highlighted what parents and carers had been saying for a long time. In responding, it was important that parents and carers were represented on bodies such as scrutiny panels as they represented a significant group of people. The needs of the Council ought not to outweigh those of families of children and young people with SEND. Provision also needed to be made for those whose first language was not English. In addition, there needed to be some semblance of truth and reconciliation.

The Chair thanked the deputation for their contribution and highlighting the issues they felt needed addressing. She felt that it was important that parents and carers were listened and responded to appropriately.

In response to a question, Ms Bernard stated that co-production meant what it said. It was about parents and carers not being told what to do but working together with the Council. The time frame in which parents and carers were given to respond to consultations was important. A range of events had been arranged as part of the response to the joint inspection. Many parents and carers had been given little or no notice of these. A minimum of 21 days notice needed to be provided. It should be possible to engage with all the families on the SEND register and not just rely on on-line feedback. She felt that if comprehensive consultation could be undertaken on proposed CPZ schemes, including door-to-door engagement, it could also be used for SEND. Co-production needed to be accessible to all and not just those on the parent-carer forum. Co-production meant that parents and carers were informed of the relevant meetings rather than finding out about them by chance, as had been the case with the current meeting.

Panel Members noted that the Scrutiny Review on SEND that had been undertaken by the Panel in 2019 had covered many of the same issues that had been highlighted in the joint inspection. Co-production was a priority for the current Council administration but it needed to deliver.

In answer to another question, Ms Bernard stated that the report on SEND by Amaze had suggested that a new parent-carer forum be set up and this was currently being done. Information on its development had only been sent out digitally though and this had excluded some parents and carers. It was important that parents and carers had a seat at the table if co-production was to be meaningful. Young people also needed to be involved and meetings made more accessible.

In answer to a question regarding what could be done to make progress quickly, Ms Bernard stated that truth and reconciliation was needed. It was essential that parents and carers were listened to. In addition, telephone calls and e-mails needed to be answered.

Michele Simmons-Safo, another member of the deputation, stated that there had been the same issues for some considerable time and parents were frustrated by the lack of progress. These issues were communication, EHC plans and lack of trust. A lot of money had been spent on the Amaze report but its recommendations were not being fully adhered to. In particular, adequate notice needed to be provided for parents or carers to attend meetings.

In answer to a question regarding what effective co-production would look like, Ms Bernard stated that it would involve parents and carers being treated as equals, being listened to, getting the services that they required and being represented in all areas where decisions that directly affected them were taken.

Councillor Zena Brabazon, the Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Families, responded that she agreed with the sentiments that had been expressed and could understand why parents and carers were angry. Co-production required individuals to represent the whole. The new parent carer forum had recently been established and had met twice so far. She gave a commitment that she would attend all of its meetings and was happy to be held accountable. She agreed that there needed to be some sort of review that captured the learning from recent experiences but this could not merely look backward as there was a need to progress. She was happy to discuss the detail of how this could operate. She had made SEND her top priority on assuming the post of Cabinet Member earlier in the year. The parent carer forum was administered by the Bridge Renewal Trust and not the Council but she nevertheless agreed that adequate notice should be given for meetings. She agreed with the suggestion that there should be a co-opted Member of the Panel to represent SEND parent and carers. In addition, the local offer website could be used to publicise future Panel meetings. She felt that the service was on an upward curve. The Ofsted report had been fair in its conclusions and she fully accepted these. Relationships with parents and carers were key to how the service should operate and the service was fully committed to developing these. She would answer all e-mails that she was sent. However, she received a lot of e-mails and had a big workload so could not always reply by return. Her role had given her the opportunity to visit a number of schools and witness some of the excellent inclusive practice that took place, some of which had been noted by Ofsted. There had been problems in the past, such as failures in communication and systems that did not work well. Things were improving though and she was determined to bring about change.

Ms Bernard stated that parents and carers had previously been given commitments there would be improvements but these had not materialised. Although the parent carer forum had technically begun to operate, much of what was required for it to function had not been established so far and relationships had yet to be developed fully. The Bridge Renewal Trust was not a SEND specific organisation and therefore needed to learn from parents and carers. Smart provision was needed in order to deliver smart outcomes.

The Panel was of the view that a joint meeting with the Adults and Health Panel could be arranged to consider relevant SEND issues that affected both children and adults. Progress with the implementation of the recommendations of the joint inspection and the written statement of action would be monitored by the Panel. In addition, the Panel would also be considering the new SEND Strategy at its meeting in March. It

was agreed that the Panel would meet separately with parent and carer representatives to obtain their views on progress as part of this ongoing process. Communication with parents and carers needed to be accessible as possible and not just reliant on digital means.

AGREED:

1. That consideration be given to the appointment of a non-voting co-opted Member to the Panel to represent Special Needs and Disabilities (SEND); and
2. That, ahead of the Panel's meeting on 7 March, a meeting be arranged between Panel Members and SEND parent and carer representatives to obtain their views on progress with the response to recommendations of the joint area inspection and associated written statement of action.

30. MINUTES

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of 23 September 2021 be approved.

31. WHITTINGTON HEALTH ESTATES AND SERVICES RECONFIGURATION - IMPLEMENTATION

Jonathan Gardner, Director of Strategy and Corporate Affairs at Whittington Health, reported on progress with the reconfiguration of their estates and services in Haringey and, in particular, the move of children's services to Tynemouth Road Health Centre. A full consultation had been undertaken on the proposed changes. Since approval of the changes, the investment for them had increased from £1 million to £1.8 million. There had been general support for the principle of bringing children's services together at the Centre but there had also been some concerns raised. Those responding to the proposals had stated that they wished to be given the opportunity to shape the design of the changes to the Centre. A range of means had been used to engage with the community and obtain their feedback and their input had been incorporated. A Changing Places toilet had been recently installed and their suggestions regarding the colour of the waiting areas had been incorporated.

In response to concerns, there would be increased parking facilities for users of the centre, with eight places made available. Most of these would be for Blue Badge holders. There would also be additional places available just outside of the centre. They had encouraged staff to reduce the use of parking spaces by them through promotion of initiatives such as the Cycle to Work scheme and Travelcard loans. They had also worked with the Council to improve access and a review of pavements nearby was taking place. They were liaising with the Council on action to address pollution in the area. Much of this was outside of the direct control of Whittington Health but they were doing what they could through measures such as the use of electric vehicles by district nurses. The building work at Centre had started and it was likely to be completed early in the new year.

Panel Members expressed disappointment at the progress report. A clear, costed plan for parking had been requested as part of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's response to the proposals. In addition, engagement needed to take place with the Council's Highways Service regarding safe crossings as the roads nearby the Centre were very busy. There also needed to be a greater commitment to addressing pollution in the area. Evidence was required that they had listened to those who had responded to the consultation and taken action in response. The aspiration needed to be for the Centre to be the safest location for children and families to receive services.

Mr Gardner responded that Whittington Health had more than doubled car parking capacity and changed their policy on staff parking. He was confident that they now had more than enough capacity for patients. They had tried to engage with the Highways Service regarding crossings and had been told that changes were included in plans for the area. They would do all that was within their powers to address pollution in the area, including expanding their fleet of electric cars and making buildings net zero. The engagement and consultation that had taken place regarding the reconfiguration had been praised by local groups of residents and held up as an example for others.

The Panel requested greater detail in future updates, including clearer evidence of the effectiveness of plans, in order that it could be satisfied that the new arrangements would be of benefit to children and families. Ms Graham agreed to assist Whittington Health in engaging with relevant Council services.

AGREED:

That a further and detailed update be circulated to Panel Members on completion of the necessary works to Tynemouth Road Health Centre.

32. SUMMARY OF AREA SEND INSPECTION

Jackie DiFolco, Assistant Director for Early Help, Prevention and SEND, summarised the outcome of the recent joint area inspection of SEND within Haringey that was undertaken by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission. The inspection had focussed on how well SEND was identified, outcomes were improved and needs met. It had highlighted some areas of strength as well as areas where action was required. The authority was required to address:

- The poor quality of EHC plans and the annual review process;
- The lack of partnership working and poor communication and co-production with parents, children and young people;
- Unacceptable waiting times for Autism Spectrum assessments and insufficient support whilst people were waiting.

These areas had already been a part of a wider improvement plan that was currently being worked upon. A written statement of action was required to be produced within 70 days. She reported on the work that was taking place with parents, carers and partners to develop a new SEND strategy and outlined the priorities that had been identified for this and the actions that had already been taken in response. There was a strong focus on outcomes so that the authority knew it was making a difference and

that these were measurable through key performance indicators, based on what families told them and what they saw. She felt that the actions were realistic and needed to be implemented with appropriate pace so that drift and delay could be avoided. To truly make the difference, there needed to be shared ownership and accountability with families and partners.

The written statement of action was being drafted based on priorities within SEND Strategy. Two workshops would be co-led with parent and carer representatives and partners on the 29 and 30 November and would cover the three key areas from the inspection. They would be co-led with parents and carers. The size of the workshops had been deliberately kept small in order to ensure meaningful discussion, however invitations had been circulated widely. The SEND Executive Board were accountable for delivery of the written statement of action, in particular, ensuring the timescales were realistic and outcomes achievable. Progress against the delivery of the plan would be reported through various governance arrangements, such as the Start Well Board and Health and Well Being Board.

The Panel were of the view that the plan was very well thought through and pleased that acknowledgement had been made that EHC Plans needed to be improved. A further report was requested in due course that specifically covered the development of a new parent carer forum. It was also requested that parent carer representatives be invited to the meeting where this report is discussed so that the Panel was also able to listen to their perspective. It was noted that many of the areas that were highlighted within the joint inspection report were the same as those that had been picked up by the earlier Scrutiny Review on SEND.

Ms DiFolco reported the joint inspection had taken the view that insufficient progress had been made in bringing about change so far. The borough was working closely with their “partner in practice” Camden that is enabling learning to be shared including experience of co-production and engagement. In addition, Haringey was part of the London Strategic Managers and Parent Carer Forum. Of the local authorities that had recently had an inspection of SEND, approximately 60% had resulted in a written statement of action.

In answer to a question, she stated that there was representation from the education sector on the SEND Executive Board. There was representation from special schools and, more recently, from early years education. However, the terms of reference were currently being reviewed and would seek to increase representation from mainstream. Secondary and post 16 provision. A request had also been received to publish agendas and minutes on the local offer page of the Council’s website and this was being considered. She was happy to circulate details of the current membership of the Board. She accepted that there was currently a disconnect between parents, carers and the Council and that there was a long way to go to establish trust. However, she and her service were totally committed to bringing about meaningful change and progress had now started to be made. There was a clear focus within this to working in partnership.

Ann Graham, Director of Children’s Services, stated that her service wanted to work closely with parents but that there had been long term issues and it was going to take time to remedy the situation. The joint inspection had stated that things were moving

in the right direction though. Some improvements had already taken place. For example, there had not previously been a SEND Executive or a newsletter.

In answer to another question, Ms DiFolco reported that a wider performance framework was being developed that did not just focus on statutory deadlines but looked at longer term trends and matters, such as disproportionality. Adequate funding remained a challenge alongside increasing number of children requiring EHC plans and packages of support. There was a significant overspend in the high needs block and this was being addressed through a financial recovery plan. This would focus on earlier intervention, including provision of therapies at an earlier stage. Although it was intended to reduce the overspend, there was nevertheless still a duty to continue to provide support for any children who needed it.

Panel Members suggested that benchmarking of levels of trust with the Council be included in the development process so that progress could be evidenced. Ms Graham stated that outcomes and impact also needed to be monitored. Consideration of appropriate performance measures would be undertaken jointly with parents and carers.

Councillor Brabazon commented that there was a long term overspend in the High Need Block. SEND was not being properly funded by the government as the duties of local authorities were not commensurate with the funding that was provided for them. The recent government spending review had included additional capital but no additional revenue funding.

Ms Bernard commented that provision for SEND and issues in one area could have an impact on others. More joined up working was therefore needed. It was important that as many SEND parents and carers were included in engagement and inclusive means of involvement needed to be used.

AGREED:

That an update on progress with action taken by the Council to respond to the recommendations of the joint inspection report be provided to the meeting of the Panel on 7 March 2022.

33. CABINET MEMBER QUESTIONS - CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND FAMILIES

AGREED:

That written responses to the questions that were submitted to the Cabinet Member in advance of the meeting be circulated to the Panel.

34. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE; ANNUAL REPORT

AGREED:

That, in view of the late hour, this item be deferred to the next meeting of the Panel.

35. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

It was noted that the review of child poverty would seek to identify the current levels of child poverty within the borough and how these have developed since the start of the current Borough Plan. In addition, it would also consider interventions that may be the most effective in responding to the current challenges presented by child poverty and how these may be incorporated strategically within the updated Borough Plan to develop a coordinated approach to the issue. The proposed items for the new scheduled meeting of the Panel on 4 January 2022 were also noted.

CHAIR: Councillor Makbule Gunes

Signed by Chair

Date