

# **MINUTES OF MEETING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON MONDAY 9TH NOVEMBER 2020**

## **PRESENT:**

**Councillors: Erdal Dogan (Chair), Dana Carlin, James Chiriyankandath, Josh Dixon, Tammy Palmer**

**Co-opted Members: Mark Chapman and Luci Davin (Parent Governor representatives), Yvonne Denny and Lourdes Keever (Church representatives)**

## **55. FILMING AT MEETINGS**

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

## **56. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None.

## **57. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

## **58. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

## **59. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS**

None.

## **60. MINUTES**

### **AGREED:**

That the minutes of the meeting of 29 September be approved.

## **61. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP**

### **AGREED:**

1. That the terms of reference and Protocol for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Panels be noted; and

2. That the policy areas/remits and membership for each Scrutiny Panel for 2020/21 be noted.

## **62. CABINET MEMBER QUESTIONS - CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.**

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Councillor Kaushika Amin, outlined key developments within the areas of her portfolio as follows:

- Local authorities had been disappointed at the lack of government support for the provision of free school meals during the Autumn half term. However, support had instead been provided locally by the Council and this had included provision for children from families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). Following the campaign that there had been on this issue, the government had now pledged to provide support during the Christmas holidays. The detail of the arrangements for this was not yet known though;
- School attendance was in line the national average but lower than before the pandemic. Schools were isolating any pupils who became infected with Covid-19 and had worked closely with the Council to put necessary preventative measures in place. Risk assessments had been done and support provided by the Council's Public Health service. Remote learning provided a means of enabling children to continue to receive education if they were unable to be in school and could provide a useful learning tool for the future. Some schools had been particularly effective in providing remote learning that was engaging, including Mulberry Primary School. However, access to the necessary IT equipment and broadband was not enjoyed by all. Schools were doing their best to assist in such circumstances;
- An increasing number of parents and carers were electing to home school their children. In a number of cases, this was due to health concerns. Some of those who were home schooled were vulnerable. The Council was looking at how home schooled children and young people could be best supported;
- Ofsted inspections had been temporarily suspended but interim ones would be taking place from the autumn onwards. Preparations were continuing to be made in case there was an inspection in Haringey;
- In respect of the social workers in schools scheme, there were now seven secondary schools that were included within the scheme.

In answer to a question regarding digital access, she stated that this was a big challenge. A range of actions were being taken. In particular, schools were providing support and had been able to lend laptops to some children. Funding had been made available from the Department for Education (DfE) for vulnerable children. In addition, some families had been referred to charities. A number of these were involved, including Children in Need. Schools were providing written materials as well so that families did not have to rely completely on IT for learning. It was noted that there were still gaps though and that the aspiration was for each child to have access to at least one device. Schools were endeavouring to help when children and young people were required to self-isolate. Eveleen Riordan, Assistant Director for Schools and Learning stated that work was being undertaken with schools to identify where there was specific need. Camden Council had begun a crowd funding campaign to fund IT equipment for school children and consideration was being given to launching a similar scheme in Haringey. Donated equipment was welcome although there were a lot of issues in respect of donated IT equipment and the provision of new devices was therefore being prioritised.

Panel Members emphasised the importance of access to IT equipment, which they felt was essential for all children from Year 5 upwards. They noted the initiatives that had been undertaken in some other London boroughs. It was felt that the government could not be relied upon to provide assistance and that a Council policy on this issue was required urgently. The Cabinet Member stated that she supported the development of a specific Council policy on digital access for pupils in schools and work could be undertaken with Haringey Education Partnership to develop one.

In answer to a question, the Cabinet Member reported that there had been a lot of work undertaken in response to the recent high court judgement regarding a disabled child. A review had been undertaken by Islington Council and the recommendations of this were being implemented. In addition, an independent review of the Disabled Children's Team was continuing and an audit of court cases had nearly been completed. The outcomes of these would all be considered by Haringey Safeguarding Children's Partnership. She welcomed the introduction of Covid winter grants, although the detail of these had not yet been made available. Action would be taken to ensure that they were received by families most in need.

Concern was expressed by Panel Members at the possibility of funding cuts to Children's Centres. It was felt that they provided very important support to disadvantaged children and parents. The Cabinet Member stated that she understood the importance of Children's Centres. There were challenges within the budget though and she wanted to look at how the Centres worked so that they could be better used. Their impact could be enhanced if more disadvantaged children and parents used them. Other boroughs included a range of additional services within their centres. The proposals would focus on improving the centres rather than cutting them.

In answer to a question, she commented that the fragmentation of education was a challenge as school provision in the borough was no longer under the overall control of the local authority. Although Haringey Education Partnership were working to hold schools within the borough together, this was not the same as having a proper structure.

In answer to a question regarding precautions to prevent transmission of Covid-19 in schools, she stated that a "bubble" approach was followed. In addition, social distancing measures were in force. Every school had undertaken a detailed risk assessment. Ms Riordan commented that contact between pupils was limited in order to minimise the number who would have to self-isolate should any become infected.

**AGREED:**

That it be recommended that a specific policy on digital access for pupils in schools be developed by the Council in partnership with Haringey Education Partnership.

**63. HARINGEY LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S BOARD; ANNUAL REPORT (APRIL 2018 TO SEPT 2019)**

David Archibald, the Independent Chair of the Haringey Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LSCB), introduced its Annual Report for 2018/19, which also included the period up to its dissolution on 29 September 2019. The LSCB had been replaced by a new multi-agency body, which had been named Haringey Safeguarding Children's Partnership. The Partnership aimed to ensure continuity and consistency so a similar name had been chosen. The new arrangements specified three strategic partners – the Council, Police and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) – who had joint and equal accountability. Other partners nevertheless continued to be actively involved. He felt that the new arrangements were working well and had responded well to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, despite them still bedding in. The strategic partners had worked especially well together. The Annual Report was the last one required by the old legislation and the first report put together under the new arrangements was due in eight months' time.

In answer to a question on the lack of reference to school governing bodies within the report, he commented that this was a valid point. There had been some debate when the government was developing proposals for the new arrangements on whether to include schools as the fourth strategic partner. However, it was felt that including all schools would not work well. It was nevertheless recognised that schools had an extremely important role to play. There was good involvement from Headteachers in Haringey, who were part of the Leadership Group. He would be happy to talk to school governing body Chairs on how they could best be involved in the new arrangements. Ann Graham, the Director of Children's Services, agreed to refer the issue of how best to involve school governing bodies to the next meeting of the Executive of the Safeguarding Partnership.

In answer to another question regarding to decrease in the number of children subject to a child protection plan, Ms Graham reported that numbers had been steadily climbing two years ago and action had therefore been taken to reduce them. The same levels of protection were still being provided though through the effective use of the signs of safety policy and the early help that was offered as part of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub. Help and support was now being provided instead of a formal intervention.

In response to a question regarding the disproportionate funding of safeguarding partnerships by local authorities, Mr Archibald stated that there had been requests at a national level for clarification regarding budget arrangements. It had been suggested that each statutory partner should contribute one third but this had not been built into the guidelines. The three statutory partners were required to make their own decisions locally but the issue was currently under active review. The matter continued to be discussed within Haringey. Specific government guidance on contributions from agencies other than the three statutory partners would be welcome.

In answer to a question, he stated that it was important to compare performance with statistical neighbours. There also needed to be clarity regarding what constituted good progress. Beverly Hendricks, Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Social Care, reported that high standards had been maintained in the timeliness and responsiveness of child protection assessments. It was agreed that work would be undertaken to ensure that there was greater clarity in statistical data in future reports and, in particular, whether developments were positive or negative.

Mr Archibald reported that it had been intended to set up a Shadow Children's Board in order to engage and involve young people. This had been delayed by the pandemic but it was hoped to progress this shortly.

**AGREED:**

1. That the issue of how best to involve school governing bodies in the Safeguarding Partnership be referred to the next meeting of the Haringey Safeguarding Partnership Executive;
2. That an interim report on the effectiveness of the new partnership arrangements for safeguarding be submitted to the Panel ahead of the publication of its first annual report; and
3. That work be undertaken to provide greater clarity in statistical data in future safeguarding partnership reports and, in particular, whether developments are positive or negative.

**64. EDUCATION UPDATE**

Ms Riordan provided an update on education issues as follows:

- 89 pupils and 81 staff had so far been confirmed as having contacted Covid-19. Measures had nevertheless been put in place in schools ahead of their reopening to minimise the risk of infection;
- There had been no standard assessment tests (SATs) for year 6 children this year and no predicted score was given. Instead, primary schools had used existing data to inform schools ahead of secondary transfer;
- There had also been no GCSE or A Level exams in England in summer 2020. An algorithm process had instead been used to predict A level results initially. This had resulted in many young people being awarded grades that were significantly below that which had been predicted. Some had missed out on their chosen university after issues had been rectified due to places already being allocated. Many young people had deferred university until 2021, which was likely to put additional pressure on places next year;
- Although grades had been awarded, they had not been published and there were no school league tables. GCSEs and A Levels would be going ahead in 2021 but had been moved back to give young people more time to prepare. SATs were expected to go ahead;
- All children and young people had needed to rely on remote learning for at least time in recent months. A joint report had been published with five other London boroughs that looked at what had worked well in order to share good practice. Haringey Education Partnership (HEP) was working with schools in order to assist them and it was also being taken up as part of continuing professional development for teachers. Action had been undertaken to ensure that it was possible to switch to remote learning smoothly should the need arise. Hard copies of learning materials had been provided where necessary. Measures had also been taken by schools to share IT equipment with families who did not have easy access. Some assistance had also been provided by the government to assist vulnerable children in accessing IT; and

- In respect of free school meals, the government had now pledged to provide further assistance during the Christmas school holidays. The detail of this was still awaited.

In answer to a question, she stated that children were isolated if they began to exhibit Covi-19 symptoms whilst at school and parent or carers were contacted and asked to pick them up. If they tested positive, they were required to self-isolate for 10 days. Schools would look at who they had come into contact with. There was little evidence so far of in-school transmission. All pupils for Year 7 upwards were required to wear masks when moving around within schools.

In answer to another question, she stated the quality of teaching was the most important factor in motivating pupils to work remotely. It had been steep learning curve for all schools. A range of tactics had been used to work effectively with the most difficult children to engage with. She reported that she was unaware of the severity of the infections that those who had tested positive for Covid had suffered but children normally only became mildly unwell.

**65. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

It was noted that the next evidence sessions of the Panel’s review on Schools would be taking place on 10 November, when evidence would be received from the Catholic and Church of England Diocesan authorities. The next regular meeting of the Panel would be focussing on the proposals for the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2021-24. In addition, there would be an update on the implementation of the recommendations of the Panel’s review on SEND and Cabinet Member Questions, with the Cabinet Member for Communities.

**AGREED:**

That the Panel’s work programme for 2020/21 be noted.

CHAIR: Councillor Erdal Dogan

Signed by Chair .....

Date .....