

MINUTES OF MEETING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON THURSDAY 23RD MARCH 2023

PRESENT:

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

Co-opted Members: Lourdes Kever (Church representative), Venassa Holt (Parent Governor representative) and Amanda Bernard (Haringey SEND Parent Carer Forum)

11. FILMING AT MEETINGS

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

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Yvonne Denny (Church representative).

13. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

15. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

16. MINUTES

The Panel noted that responses were still awaited for some of actions arising of the joint meeting with the Adults and Health Panel on 9th February. Once they had all been received, they would be circulated to the Panel.

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meetings of 3 January (budget) and 9 February 2023 (joint meeting with Adults and Health Panel) be approved.

17. CABINET MEMBER QUESTIONS - CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

Councillor Zena Brabazon, the Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Families, answered questions from the Panel on developments in her portfolio. The Panel

noted that the Ofsted inspection of Children's Social Care Services had been completed and the report was due to be published on 11th April.

In answer to a question regarding the funding of Children's Centres, she stated that the Council had been adversely affected by cuts to funding due to the government's austerity policies and therefore had been unable to provide any more money for them. The number of centres had been reduced from 16 to 9 since 2016/17. The borough was fortunate to have more than many authorities and there was a commitment to ensure that they were accessible to all. The new Early Years Strategy had outlined a number of priorities that included the role of the Children Centres.

In answer to a question regarding the establishment of Family Hubs, she reported that they were different to Children's Centres as they were for families with children aged 0 - 19. Funding came from central government and there was strict and rigid criteria attached to it. The funding could not be used for existing services. The new hubs would be in addition to and complement Children's Centres delivery. Most of the funding was focused on perinatal health and the first 1,000 days of life. The plan was for four hubs to be established in the borough. One of these would be at the Triangle Centre and location of the others still had to be determined. She was happy to attend any school governors meetings to which she was invited in order to brief them on the changes. She would discuss how engagement on the new hubs could be enhanced with officers. The first of the new hubs was due to be launched in June.

In answer to a question regarding schools in financial deficit, she reported that the Council was working very closely with them as well as those using reserves to balance their budgets. Achieving financial balance was challenging when there were falling numbers of children on school rolls. Where headteachers or senior members of staff had resigned, governing bodies were being encouraged to collaborate. Falling school rolls was a London wide problem and not just confined to Haringey. The Council would provide any help that it could to support schools during this difficult period.

In answer to a question regarding the adoption of the Haringey Safety Valve and the proposed new banding system for SEND, the Cabinet Member reported that they were not linked. The proposed banding system was still being developed and there would be further discussion and engagement with schools, parents, carers and partners regarding it. There would also be consideration of it through the Schools Forum and its High Needs Block working group. Draft proposals on the Safety Valve programme suggested that it would lead to an increase in resources and efforts were being made to ensure that its distribution was more equitable.

In answer to a question regarding the Baroness Casey report on the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police, the Cabinet Member reported that it had only just been published. It had therefore not been possible to determine its full implications. There was a lot of work taking place with the Police on a range of issues including knife crime, Violence Against Women and Girls and mental health. In addition, there had been Police officers who worked in schools for some considerable time. The Police had been excellent and consistent safeguarding partners and were also a key part of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

Beverley Hendricks, Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Social Care acknowledged that the report was a source of concern and time would be needed to consider a response. It was nevertheless important to distinguish between the Business Command Unit (BCU) that covered Haringey and Enfield and the Metropolitan Police as a whole. Any issues that had been raised locally in recent years with the BCU had been addressed and they had been very responsive to issues that arose. For example, Stop and Search, including safeguarding and welfare concerns, had been addressed. It was agreed that the Police would be invited to a future meeting to report on issues arising from the Casey Report, Stop and Search and safeguarding.

The Panel were of the view that the key issue arising from the Casey report was how it was ensured that young people had confidence in the Police as the report had shaken trust in them. Consideration needed to be given not just to how the community got the standard of policing it deserved but also to how confidence was established.

Concern was expressed by the Panel regarding stress arising from Ofsted inspections on teachers and the mental health impact of this. The Cabinet Member stated that she shared the Panel's concern. Ann Graham, the Director of Children's Services, stated that there were Council services available to support schools and teachers, including mental health support, for those who bought into the Council's services. Schools that did not could make their own arrangements. She would check to see what the Council's offer for community schools was.

Panel Members highlighted a recent incident where BID street rangers had handcuffed a young boy in Chichester and enquired whether there had been any concerns regarding their operations in Haringey. The Cabinet Member stated that there had been no incidents reported to her but she would make further enquiries and report back. Ms. Graham stated that her own experience of BID street rangers had been positive. In particular, they had been involved in the development of the Youth at Risk strategy and because of this were now reporting children and young people found out of school. She was nevertheless happy to speak with them in order to minimise the risk of anything similar occurring in Haringey.

In answer to a question regarding the outcome of the recent OFSTED inspection, Ms Graham reported that the report would be published on 11th April and could be reported to the next meeting of the Panel.

AGREED:

That the Director of Children's Services be requested to provide further information on the support offered to teaching staff of Community Schools that buy into the Council's services, including mental health.

18. HARINGEY CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP - ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

David Archibald, the Independent Chair, gave a presentation to the Panel on the Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report for 2021-22. The Chair thanked him for all of the work that the partnership undertook.

In answer to a question regarding whether there were enough social workers in the borough, Ms Hendricks reported that the ratio of case need to social worker showed that there were currently sufficient numbers. There was a policy not to carry social worker vacancies and a range of options available to ensure that there was a strong pipeline of staff. Further work was being undertaken to increase the number, skills and confidence of social workers. In respect of mental health support, there had recently been a joint meeting of the Panel with the Adults and Health Panel that had looked at activity levels, vision and ambition. Further consideration of relevant issues needed to be arranged, together with partners. There were currently challenges across NHS services. There were also challenges that remained from Covid, which would need to be addressed by both the Council and NHS colleagues.

In answer to a question regarding areas of concern for the partnership, Mr Archibald stated that he would raise any immediate concerns with relevant officers in the first instance. Child protection systems around the country were under a lot of pressure. There had been particular challenges during the Covid pandemic but these had been handled well in Haringey. The Panel requested an understanding of where specifically the pressures were and what were the issues that they should be looking at. Mr Archibald reported that, on a national basis, there were a large number of qualified staff leaving children's social work due to its challenging nature.

In response to a question regarding relationship based social work practice, Mr Archibald stated that this was the model used in Haringey and there was a commitment to develop it further. Ms Hendricks reported that the practice model used in Haringey was referred to as Signs of Safety. It had been developed following a review of practice in Haringey that had recommended the adoption of a strength based approach. This had been implemented and built on a relationship based practice approach. There had been a conscious move away from a compliance model in order to build pathways to protection based on the confidence and trust of parents and carers. It aimed to promote empathy and understanding, without ignoring harm and risk.

In answer to a question regarding the role of schools, Mr Archibald stated that they and the safeguarding leads within them were crucial. There were representatives of primary, secondary and special schools on the Partnership's Leadership Group. When the new arrangements for safeguarding children had been developed, there had been a debate regarding whether schools should also be included as statutory partners and discussion of this was continuing. Whilst schools were clearly of great importance, local authorities could have a very large number within them and this presented practical challenges. Schools were well integrated into arrangements within Haringey though, with Headteachers on the Leadership Group and effective work taking place with safeguarding leads in schools. Ms Hendricks reported that a recently and highly respected retired Headteacher had been invited out of retirement by the partnership to liaise with and represent all schools in the borough on the HCSP partnership.

The Panel stated that the issue of links with schools had been raised previously. Unlike boroughs like Camden and Hammersmith and Fulham, there was no explicit reference to the relationship with schools in the Partnership's Annual Report. The Panel was of the view that the Annual Report should make explicit reference to links with schools in future. Mr Archibald stated that schools were crucial and he agreed with the sentiments that had been expressed. Headteachers had been involved in the drafting of the current annual report but he would ensure that there was a stronger emphasis on the role of schools in it next time.

The Chair asked Mr Archibald how confident he was that the partnership was working effectively to safeguard children. In response, he stated that, as Independent Chair, he saw the three statutory partners working very closely together to make safeguarding as effective as possible and ensure close working between front line practitioners. An example of this was the Practice Week that had recently taken place, as referred to in his presentation.

In answer to a question regarding links with schools, the Panel noted that the recently retired Headteacher previously referred to had been appointed to work with schools to provide an additional voice for them on the partnership. He had only retired a very short time ago and was known and highly respected by schools in the borough. The Panel welcomed this but were also of the view that a range of experience from Headteachers needed to be sought and incorporated.

The Panel thanked Mr Archibald and officers for the presentation and their work as part of the partnership.

19. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE; ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

Beverley Hendricks presented that Annual Report for Children's Social Care, as included in the agenda papers for the meeting. The Panel congratulated the service for the report and particularly the work that had been done to develop the Council's own social work academy and recruitment drive. It was noted that there had been a drop in the number of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans that were completed within 20 weeks. In response, Jackie Difolco (Assistant Director for Early Help and Prevention) reported that the service had undergone restructuring during this period, which had resulted in a number of staff leaving. The new structure had now been implemented, new staff recruited and training taken place. 70% of assessments were now, on average, completed within 20 weeks and this would be reflected in the next annual report.

In respect of factors found at the end of assessment, the Panel requested a gender breakdown where these related to alcohol misuse. In answer to a question regarding ethical recruitment, Ms Hendricks stated that there was an ethical code that ensured new recruits were well supported when they arrived in the UK. There was a generous relocation package and staff were able to support their families and bring spouses and children to join them.

In answer to a question regarding adoption, Ms Hendricks stated that the assessment process for adoption involved a high degree of challenge and support. Information was gathered and kept in a children's permanency record, including background and

heritage, so that they had a record that could be accessed if required at a later stage. Adoptive parents could access support through the regional adoption agency or local authority. This included an adoption support fund, which included financial and therapeutic help if required. Comprehensive packages could be designed to avoid breakdown of placements. Adoption failure was rare and data on this was kept centrally. She agreed to share this with the Panel if it was possible to disaggregate figures for Haringey. The Council had also invested in a scheme called Pause, which was a national programme that sought to avoid unnecessary adoptions by working with parents who had previously had children removed from their care. A spectrum of approaches was required for interventions to ensure that children were able to remain with families.

In answer to a question regarding children who were out of school, Jane Edwards (Assistant Director for Schools and Learning), reported that the number of these fluctuated. They were identified by a number of means and action was taken to get them back into school as soon as possible. In some cases, children became electively home educated. If it was not possible to find the child or young person, a multi-agency was arranged to decide what further action to take. The number of children who were out of school in Haringey was very low and compared well with other authorities, with only 35 identified in the previous week. This was not considered to be a significant number.

AGREED:

1. That, in respect of factors found at the end of assessments, the Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Social Care be requested to provide the Panel with a gender breakdown of where these relate to alcohol misuse; and
2. That the Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Social Care be requested to provide the Panel with statistics for the number of adoption breakdowns in Haringey.

20. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2022-2026

Ms Hendricks introduced and outlined the LAC Sufficiency Strategy for 2022-2026, which had been circulated with the agenda papers for the meeting. The Panel congratulated the service on the work that had been undertaken. In answer to a question, Ms Hendricks stated that it was a live document. There were eight priorities within it and an action plan. Progress against the priorities was reviewed regularly and she hoped to return to the Panel to provide an update on further progress. It was agreed that a further report would be requested, including detail on outcomes.

Ms Graham thanked Ms Hendricks and her staff for all the work that had been done on this issue. Such a strategy did not exist five years ago and significant progress had been made. In particular, she was particularly proud of the opening of the Haslemere Road children's residential home, which enabled children to remain in the borough and represented a noteworthy improvement in outcomes.

The Chair, on behalf of the Panel, thanked officers for their work. She stated that significant progress had been made during the past year.

AGREED:

That a further report, providing an update on progress in achieving targets within the strategy, be submitted to the Panel in due course.

21. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Panel noted that it would be meeting on 6th April to gather further evidence as part of its review on Physical Activity and Sport. The next ordinary meeting would be on 26th June. The main items for this would be Stop and Search and SEND – Prevention and Early Intervention. The Panel had agreed to undertake a review on Housing and Children and identified a number of areas of potential focus. These could be broken down into two distinct areas – social housing and private sector. In order for the review to be effective and deliver tangible outcomes, it was recommended that it focus on a discrete area that could be looked at in detail. It was therefore suggested that either social housing or private sector be chosen for consideration in the first instance.

Ms Graham reported that the report of the recent OFSTED inspection of the local authority would be available by the time of the next meeting. It was agreed that this would be given priority on the agenda and that, if need be, one of the other items be deferred to make sufficient space.

In respect of the review on Housing and Children, the Cabinet Member stated that she welcomed a review on this issue. Consideration of the issue of housing allocations and how they impacted on children would be particularly welcome. The Panel agreed that the review would look at social housing in the first instance and, in particular, housing allocations. Consideration could be given to commissioning further work on private sector housing in due course.

AGREED:

1. That a report on the outcome of the recent Ofsted inspection of Children's Social Care and the action plan arising from this be submitted to the next ordinary meeting of the Panel; and
2. That the forthcoming review on Housing and Children focus on social housing and, in particular, allocations in the first instance.

22. VOTE OF THANKS

It being the last ordinary meeting of the Panel for the current Municipal Year, the Chair was thanked by the Panel for her work as Chair. The Chair thanked Members and officers for their kind assistance and co-operation

CHAIR: Councillor Makbule Gunes

Signed by Chair

Date