

## **REPORT OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY PANEL THURSDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2012**

The draft minutes of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel are herewith attached. Key items discussed were as follows:

### **1. SCHOOL PLACES**

The Panel received a presentation on school places, including allocations, levels of demand and funding issues. Pressures on primary school places that had taken place in Muswell Hill ward were raised but it was noted that most children in the area had nevertheless been accommodated locally. The situation was being monitored to see if there was a need for additional places. Issues were also raised about pressure for places within the Highgate area. It was possible that schools in Barnet, Camden and Islington might be closer and contact details of neighbouring boroughs were routinely provided to parents. All children requiring a secondary school place had been accommodated at a school within three miles of where they lived.

The Panel noted that it had been planned that a free school would open in Tottenham in September 2013. There was currently no site for this school and the issue of sponsorship had still not been resolved. Plans for expansion of other schools in the area were withdrawn when it was thought that the free school would be proceeding but these might need to be re-visited.

We **AGREED**:

1. That plans to expand the number of school places to accommodate the additional pressure for school places be supported; and
2. That a map showing where pressure and demand on school places are be circulated and that further information be provided to the Panel on:
  - Nursery funding;
  - Government funding for school expansion and how it was being distributed across the Borough;
  - Any plans to expand provision in the Muswell Hill area and, in particular, the detailed investigations into feasibility of Muswell Hill Primary School and position of St James Primary School;

### **2. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

The Deputy Director, Children and Families, reported that, where possible, children were placed in or as close to Haringey as possible. Only placements rated by OFSTED as good or outstanding were used. It was rare for a placement to be chosen just because there was nowhere else available. There needed to be a good reason for placing a child or young person away from the borough but there could be challenges in placing sibling groups. We noted that placements away from the borough were only made for specific reasons, such as the proximity of family or to escape involvement with gangs.

We **AGREED** to recommend that the Children and Young People's Service make all efforts to ensure that children are placed in or as close to Haringey as possible.

### **3. BUDGET MONITORING**

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The Panel noted that budgetary pressures within Children's Social Care were so far being contained. In particular, there were pressures within budgets for legal costs and clients with no recourse to public funds. A number of Looked After Children cases had particular high unit costs associated with them due to the need for some high cost placements. The budget for this was volatile due to the comparatively small numbers involved. Budgeting for them had reduced from previous years and numbers were currently decreasing.

Concern was expressed by Panel Members at the loss of a number of in-house foster carers in the last two years, which impacted on the Council's budget. The Deputy Director, Children and Families, acknowledged that their number needed to increase and work was being undertaken to understand why there had been a reduction. The Panel raised the issue of the Welfare Reform Act and its impact on Children's Services. The Cabinet Member reported that much work had been undertaken and, in particular, the Local Children's Safeguarding Board had received a presentation on the issue.

We **AGREED** that the issues of the recruitment of foster parents and the impact of the Welfare Reform Act be considered as part of the Panel's work on the budget.

### **4. ADOPTION SERVICE - UPDATE**

The Panel noted that the Adoption Scorecard had shown Haringey to be second from bottom nationally in terms of performance. Following this, a diagnostic assessment was undertaken in order to facilitate improvement and an improvement plan initiated that aimed to speed up the process.

There had been changes to the consideration process and especially assessments. Previous adopters and foster carers were now fast tracked. There were a range of other issues that needed addressing and which had been identified as sources of delay. In particular, a number of children did not have a social worker and there was a high staff turnover. Focused work on recruitment was taking place with the aim of recruiting high quality social workers. The improvement plan was already showing improvements with 19 matches made so far this year, which was more than in the whole of last year.

We **AGREED** that a further report on progress with the implementation of the improvement plan would be submitted to the Panel in due course.

### **5. CABINET MEMBERS QUESTIONS - CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN**

The Panel received an update from Councillor Ann Waters, the Cabinet Member for Children, on the main areas of work that were currently taking place within her portfolio. In particular, it noted that proposals had been agreed by Cabinet to initiate the closure of the John Loughborough School due to its underperformance and the lack of any sustained improvement in standards arising from various interventions. In the meantime, efforts were taking place to establish the school as a sponsored academy. Were these to be successful, the consultation process would be terminated. If the school were to close, this would happen at the end of an academic year.

The Panel raised the fact that £4 million had been invested in new school buildings as part of the Building Schools for the Future project. Information was requested on what would happen to the buildings should the school close and whether any measures were considered to protect public money invested in the site. Officers agreed to respond on this issue in due course.

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Faith schools were able to set their own admissions criterion but these only applied if the school was oversubscribed. If a suitable academy sponsor was found and an academy established, new admissions criterion would have to be developed and agreed. Prospective parents were being informed of the current position and parents of children at the school had been written to when the Cabinet report was released.

Concerns were raised by Panel Members that the budgetary issues in respect of Children's Centres had not yet been resolved. It was agreed that a briefing note on progress would be circulated to Panel Members.

**AGREED:**

That the Panel be provided with further information on:

- Details of the restructure as soon as possible;
- Measures to protect Building Schools for the Future capital funding invested in the John Loughborough site;
- Ethnic monitoring data for John Loughborough School; and
- Budgetary issues in respect of Children's Centres.

**6. WORK PLAN**

**AGREED:**

1. That an item be added to the agenda for the January meeting of the Panel outlining progress and current issues in respect of Children Centres.
2. That an in-depth piece of work be undertaken by the Panel on school places.

**Clr Martin Newton  
Chair**