

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

Councillors Allison, Brabazon, Christophides and Newton (Chair)

Co-opted Members Ms Y. Denny (Church of England representative), Mr E. Reid (Parent Governor) and Mrs M. Ezeji (Parent Governor).

**LC1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Chair welcomed Members and officers to the inaugural meeting of the Panel.

**LC2. URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

**LC3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

**LC4. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS**

None.

**LC5. TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Chair reported that the generic terms of reference for all of the scrutiny panels had been agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 July. Concerns had been expressed by some Members at the need for the panels to have their recommendations approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which could lead to delays.

The Panel noted that the panels would each meet five times per year, one of which would be a specific meeting to consider budgetary issues.

**AGREED:**

That the report be noted.

**LC6. 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.

She reported that the Children and Young People's Service was currently in the process of restructuring. There had previously been a need for increased capacity at senior level whilst the service was in special measures. It was now out of special measures and on a more stable footing. There was now also a need to make large savings and, as a result of this, the post of Deputy Director – Children and Families was to be deleted. The Children and Families business unit currently had both a deputy director and an assistant director, which was unusual. The unit had previously had many staff who were either interim or temporary but it had now stabilised considerably. The post of assistant director was being retained. The Cabinet Member

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agreed to share the new structure with the Panel when it had been finalised. The Panel expressed their thanks to Debbie Haith, the Deputy Director – Children and Families, who was leaving as a result of the changes.

The Cabinet Member also reported on the following issues:

- All children requiring a reception place in school had now been successfully placed. This was not the case elsewhere and represented an impressive achievement by the service. The establishment of a free school with 90 places in Tottenham had assisted in ensuring that the necessary places were available.
- All schools had done very well again with their GCSE and A Level results. However, there was still more to be done and it was important to ensure that schools did not coast. Efforts to improve standards were therefore being made across the board.
- There had been a number of OFSTED inspections of schools recently. The results of some of these had been good whilst others had been less so. The inspection regime was getting tougher and work would be needed to maintain high standards.
- Proposals had been agreed by the 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. There would be an initial consultation period of 7 weeks. Following this, formal proposals will be developed and a statutory consultation of six weeks would take place. 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 noted 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.

The Panel noted that faith schools were able to set their own admissions criterion but these only applied if the school was over subscribed. 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. Children looking for a school place during outside of the normal admissions process were offered a place at the school nearest to them with an available place.

The school had been intermittently an OFSTED category of concern for approximately 11 years and the full range of interventions attempted without securing sustained improvement. This created long-term uncertainty. The Secretary of State had the power to close the school but as the school was a community school, it was considered by the Council that the community should have the right to decide upon its future.

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In response to a question, it was reported that a Notice of Improvement had previously been served on the school. A range of interventions had been made to improve standards at the school but without sufficient success. It was agreed that ethnic monitoring statistics for the school, when available, would be shared with the Panel.

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.

### **LC7. BUDGET MONITORING**

The Panel noted that, whilst there were budgetary pressures within Children's Social Care, these were so far being contained. In particular, there were some 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. However, the budget for this was subject to volatility due to the comparatively small numbers of clients involved. There were approximately 550 – 560 Looked After Children. Budgeting for them had reduced from previous years and their numbers were currently decreasing.

Concern were expressed by Panel Members at the loss of a number of in-house foster carers in the last two years, which could impact of the Council's budget. It was agreed that this issue would be considered further as part of the Panel's work on the budget.

The Deputy Director, Children and Families, acknowledged that the number of in-house foster parents needed to increase and work was being undertaken to understand why there had been a reduction. A lot of carers took short term placements but the pattern was now for there to be more long term placements. Officers were working to encourage carers to re-categorise from short term to longer term placements. The number of new foster parents that had been recruited had been cancelled out by the number that had been de-registered.

The Panel noted that legal costs had reduced by £¾m. and there were now 40% less procedures. The service met regularly with the Legal Service and the situation was constantly monitored and reviewed. Risks were now being managed differently and there had been a large improvement.

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. It was noted that there could be particular impact on foster carers if there were gaps between placements. Panel Members also raised the issue of the potential

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impact on schools which could have a destabilising effect. It was agreed that the issue would also be considered further as part of the Panel's work on the budget.

**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.

**LC8. SCHOOL PLACES**

It was noted that the Panel had requested additional information the following:

- Nursery Places and the funding changes that have occurred in the past year.
- Funding for school places and the extra £1.7m from government provided for expansion.

It was agreed that this would be provided in due course.

The Chair requested details on the particular pressures on primary school places that had taken place in Muswell Hill ward. The Panel noted that most of the children in question had been accommodated in local schools. This had been possible due to movement taking place after allocations had been first notified with some parents moving away from the area and others choosing to use the independent schools sector instead. However, the situation was being monitored closely to see if there was a need for additional places in the area.

It was known that there would be larger cohorts to accommodate in secondary schools in future years and work was being undertaken to ensure that this was possible.

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. It was noted that all children requiring a secondary school place had been accommodated at a school within three miles of where they lived.

Members of the Panel asked if it would be possible for Councillors to be invited to the Primary Place Planning Summit. Officers agreed to investigate whether this was possible.

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 were withdrawn when it was thought that the free school would be proceeding. These might need to be re-visited if it seemed likely that the free school would not be opening.

In response to a question, the Deputy Director for Prevention and Early Intervention reported that that secondary transfer forms were available in all schools as well a customer service centres. However, the Children and Young People's Service encouraged discussion of any issues that might prompt a parent to wish to transfer their child to another school so that any issues could be addressed.

**AGREED:**

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1. 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. That plans to expand the number of school places to accommodate the additional pressure for school places be supported.

### **LC9. ADOPTION SERVICE - UPDATE**

The Panel noted that nationally there had been a reduction in the number of adoptions. In addition, there was considerable variation in performance between local authorities. As a result of this, the government was now trying to speed up performance. The Adoption Scorecard showed comparative data for local authorities and introduced key indicators for performance. The Scorecard showed Haringey to be second from bottom nationally in terms of performance. Following this, a diagnostic assessment was undertaken in order to facilitate improvements.

There was currently a target of 21 months which, over time, would be reduced to 14 months and then 10 months. The Council had not been hitting the 21 month target regularly enough. The improvement plan aimed to speed up the process. It included a permanency policy and the recruitment of a specialist social worker to focus exclusively on family finding and executing adoption placements. Monitoring had also been improved and measures taken to increase the number of adopters through better publicity.

The Panel noted that there had been changes in the consideration process and especially assessments. There was a flexible approach towards matching, especially in respect of factors such as age and ethnicity. In particular, it was now considered that black children should not have to wait longer due to the lack of a specific ethnic match. There was no upper age limit and this was merely looked at in relation to health. Previous adopters and foster carers were now fast tracked. 15 prospective adopters had been successfully vetted so far and there were another 10 to come. The preparation and assessment process would be changing from next year with the addition of a pre-preparation stage. It was noted that, if looked after child were adopted, this benefited the Council's budget.

The diagnostic process had allowed the service to identify where improvements were most needed. There were a range of 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, in addition, 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.

The Panel thanked officers for the report and requested to be updated on progress in due course. They also requested that, if possible, future reports be made more user friendly with less use of technical terms.

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**AGREED:**

That a further report on progress with the implementation of the improvement plan be submitted to the Panel in due course.

**LC10. FOSTERING SERVICE - UPDATE**

The Panel noted work that was taking place to recruit and retain foster carers. As part of this, a specific part of the service was now focused specifically on recruitment. Targets for improvement had been set including 48 additional placements by 2014. These were based on what it was felt was achievable.

In response to a question, the Deputy Director, Children and Families, reported that the service gave careful consideration on how best to support foster carers. However, children requiring placement had become more challenging in nature in recent years. The service had to be careful to ensure that foster carers were able to cope with children that were placed with them. In terms of recruitment, foster carers were being used to encourage other foster carers to work for Haringey. In addition, efforts were being made to develop a "brand Haringey". The borough paid competitive rates in comparison to neighbouring boroughs. Particular efforts were being made to recruit carers working for private agencies to come to work in Haringey. Although significant numbers of carers had been deregistered, quality had improved and the capacity was significantly better.

The Panel noted that there were challenges to be addressed. In particular, Haringey was losing as many foster carers as it was recruiting.

**LC11. 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. However, there could be challenges in placing sibling groups. All placements were regularly reviewed. The Panel noted that placements outside of Haringey were often also considerably more expensive.

It was 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. In response to a question, it was reported that £2 million less was now being received from the NHS due to a number of reasons.

**AGREED:**

That all efforts be made to ensure that children are placed in or as close to Haringey as possible.

**LC12. EARLY INTERVENTION:**

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The Programme Manager for Haringey 54,000 reported on the current change programme that was aimed at ensuring that the Council delivered the right services at the right time. It was acknowledged that the report was a high level document. It would be possible to provide a more detailed report in a few months time.

The Panel raised the issue of the shortage of health visitors in the area and agreed that this issue would be re-visited in due course. They noted that health visitors would be the responsibility of local authorities from 2015.

Concern was expressed by Panel Members at the current position of Children's Centres within the borough. They were currently operating on very small budgets and played a very important role in helping parents access a range of services including health visitors and speech therapists. It was felt that if savings or underspends were identified elsewhere, these should be invested in Children's Centres.

The Cabinet Member reported that savings were having to be made as the budget was being cut. It was nevertheless acknowledged that early intervention facilitated by Children's Centres could help the Council save money in the long term. Current provision was now intended to focus on the most needy. Concern was expressed by Panel Members that this could lead to a segregated model of care, which was not considered desirable.

In response to a question regarding the Youth Service, it was reported that there was now significantly less provision. However, there was still much that was being done including a summer youth programme which involved over 1300 young people. The essential part that the voluntary sector took in providing youth services was acknowledged.

### **AGREED:**

1. That a further more detailed report be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel outlining progress with the project; and
2. That a report on youth provision and diversionary activities be submitted to a future meeting of the Panel.

### **LC13. 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**