

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY PANEL
TUESDAY, 11 DECEMBER 2012**

Councillors: Allison, Brabazon, Christophides and Newton (Chair)

Co-opted Member: Mr. E. Reid (Parent Governor)

LC14. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting of the Panel.

LC15. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

LC16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

LC17. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

LC18. MINUTES

Our Chair reported that there were still several actions arising from the previous meeting that had not yet been addressed. The Director of Children and Young People's Services apologised for this and agreed to ensure that any outstanding matters were dealt with.

In respect of John Loughborough School, it was noted that children were still being admitted to the school. This was because it was necessary to place children in schools where there were vacancies. The school would need to continue to operate normally until such time that a decision was made to close. The position of the school had been fully communicated to parents. Other schools were also aware of the position although it was not clear whether any specific allowances were being made by them in respect of in year admissions.

There was shortly to be a Cabinet Member signing in respect of future options for the school and whether or not to go ahead with proposals to close the school. Time had been allowed for people to respond and for the school to seek an external sponsor. Although the school had identified a potential sponsor, they had been rejected by the Department for Education. If a final decision was made to close the school, this would happen at the end of the summer term. Alternative school places would be found for children at the school. It was possible though that the school would be kept open for those young people taking their GCSEs in order to minimise any disruption that might impact on their performance. A significant number of children at the school came from outside of the borough so it was not necessarily the case that the schools closure would increase pressure on nearby schools.

The Chair raised the issue of whether any measures had been undertaken to protect the Council's investment in the school. Information had been requested in respect of this by the last meeting of the Panel. The Cabinet Member for Children agreed to follow up on this issue.

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It was noted that information had also been requested about the restructuring of the Children and Young People's service. Work on this was still ongoing and the Cabinet Member for Children agreed to let the Panel have further details when the work had been completed.

In response to a question, the Cabinet Member for Children reported that an application to set up a free school in Tottenham had recently been turned down by the Department for Education. The next round of applications would be for 2014 onwards.

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of 27 September 2012 be approved.

LC19. DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2013-16

The Panel expressed concern at the changes to early intervention grant that had led to a £3 million loss in funding for the Children's Service. Funding from this had been top sliced by the government to fund expansion of the programme for two year olds. An element had been passported back into in the Dedicated Schools Budget (DSB) but this had left a significant shortfall on previous overall levels. The issue was not unique to Haringey and had affected most local authorities.

The Panel requested assurances that no school would be worse off as a result of changes to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The Cabinet Member for Children reported that the Schools Forum had already agreed the funding formula but the final allocation of funds for schools had not yet been completed fully. The only schools likely to lose any funding were those that were not completely full. This was due to changes by the government to the relevant funding formula and would apply to Heartlands and Thomas More. Other schools would get additional funding from other sources in due course.

Details of the split between schools and early years in proposed capital expenditure were requested. It was noted that the amount was earmarked largely for schools. The amounts for years after 2013/14 were less as announcements on funding from the government were still awaited. All of the £20 million in the budget for 2013/14 was from the government. It was noted that some work was being done on developing plans for early years. There was likely to be between £600 – 700k available for early years in 2013/14 with more significant amounts in future years. The Panel requested further details of this in due course.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Carbon Reduction reported that when work on the MTFP had begun, the Children and Young People's Service had still been in special measures and therefore a more risk averse approach had been adopted. The proposed savings were based on the further reduction in the numbers of looked after children (LAC). Significant reductions in these had already been achieved. The service was now focussed on developing a modernised approach. The Council's strategy in respect of funding cuts was to prioritise the front line. 41% of cuts so far had been to back office functions whilst other areas had suffered cuts of 27%. The figure for the Children and Young People's Service was 16%, which included universal services such as Connexions and the Youth Service. The figure for Adult Services was 11%.

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The Panel stated that they were pleased at the reduction in the number of LAC that had taken place. The Director of Children Services stated that not only was the number of LAC coming down but the time that it took for children to be adopted had also reduced through quicker processes. The ultimate aim was to reduce the rate of LAC to a level more consistent with similar authorities by 2015. The reduction in LAC meant that there was also a reduced need for social work and legal support. The whole system of support had been looked at in depth. Comparisons had been made with areas that had a good record for safety. She was confident that if changes were undertaken systematically they would be safe.

The Panel felt that projected reductions in to 400 in the number of LAC (line C1 of the budget proposals) were reasonable, particularly as unit costs per child could range from £50k to much higher. It was felt that early intervention had the potential to yield greater reductions in due course and that at least some of the savings should therefore be reinvested in prevention. The Cabinet Member for Resources and Carbon Reduction acknowledged that this made sense but that the Council was striving dealing with a large fiscal gap which could eventually amount to a 51% reduction.

As part of the work that had been undertaken, the proportion of budget spent on LAC and safeguarding had been compared with other boroughs. Haringey currently spent 80% of its budget on these areas. In other authorities, this figure was between 50 and 60%. The aim was to re-balance the budget along similar lines. In terms of the threshold pyramid, the Director stated that this was not always being applied and some cases were going through the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which would not be subject to the same assessment processes elsewhere. Such processes were very expensive if families did not require them.

It was noted that a number of reviews of early years services (C2) needed to be completed and this included children's centres. Extensive consultation was taking place, particularly with families. The feedback from this would be used to help re-design services. The Cabinet Member for Resources and Carbon Reduction stated that there was still a budget gap that needed to be filled. As part of future planning, reviews of a whole range of services would take place and there would be opportunities for scrutiny Members to look at these in detail.

In respect of the reduction in SEN travel costs (C8), the Director of the Children and Young People's Service was of the view that most parents would choose to send their children locally to the Brook and Riverside schools and other SEN provision within the borough and stated that the savings were based on what was currently happening within the budget.

Panel Members questioned whether the projected reductions in LAC (C1) might be over optimistic. The Director of the Children and Young People's Service stated that the rate of reduction had been steady and was carefully monitored. It was therefore considered to be achievable. The Panel noted achievement of the reduction in LAC was critical to the success of the budget proposals.

Panel Members asked about careers and further education advice provided to young people and whether this was aspirational and gave young people the best chances and how this was monitored. The Cabinet Member of Resources and Carbon

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Reduction reported the challenge that the Council faced in providing careers advice was how to ensure quality without providing the service itself. In terms of Bruce Grove Youth Centre, he stated that its level of openness would vary. It had been open for 5 days per week during the summer when £200k had been obtained for the summer programme. There had been good feedback on this. The number of days that it was open had since reduced to 4 and then 3 days per week. The 12 for 12 pledge had never been a formal decision by the Council. He acknowledged that the service had not been good at advertising and this had now been rectified.

The key issue that needed to be addressed was what was best for the Youth Service as a whole. He felt that it needed to adopt a targeted approach to its work. The sphere of influence of its work also needed to be considered. In addition, the post code issues needed to be taken into account. The Youth Strategy had been developed and this provided for an extension of the age range of young people that the Youth Service catered for to include 8 to 13 year olds. Its focus was now on prevention and, as part of this, it was aiming to engage with siblings of young people who were involved with gangs. The service was also empowering young people to decide upon the services that they wanted through involving them as commissioners of services. Although it might be possible for Bruce Grove Youth Centre to open 5 days per week, this would not necessarily constitute the best use of resources.

The Youth Strategy, with its focus on outreach and peripatetic work, represented a significant change of emphasis for the service. It now had an annual budget of £1.3 million and 33 staff. One of the key questions that needed to be looked at was which cohorts of young people used facilities. It was possible that the cohort that used Bruce Grove was quite small.

In answer to a question, the Director of Children and Young Peoples Services reported that take up levels for Children's Centres were being looked at. This had not yet been undertaken for the Youth Service.

The Panel requested further details of the work that was undertaken by the Youth Service and how it was evaluated. In addition, it was felt that reducing the age range could represent a significant challenge that required different skills. Further information about how this would be accomplished was requested. Details of which wards Youth Service activity was taking place within was also requested.

The Cabinet Member for Resources and Carbon Reduction reported that there was not enough activity across Tottenham and there was a challenge in making the area more fun to live in for young people. Measures needed to be developed to evaluate services effectively. There was plenty of activity taking place and details would be shared with Panel Members.

The Panel thanked the Cabinet Members and officers for their attendance,

AGREED:

1. That the Panel notes that the success of the budget proposals is very much dependent on the continued reduction in the numbers of LAC and, although the projected reductions are very welcome, concern be expressed at the potential of these not being achieved and the implications that this might have.

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2. That the Panel requests clarification of why savings in legal costs (C4) are not being re-invested within the budget for Children and Young People's Services.
3. That the Panel recommend that, as far as is possible, no school should lose out as a result of changes to School Funding and noted the assurances provided that only two schools – Heartlands and St Thomas More's are likely to be adversely affected.
4. That more detail be provided to the Panel on services for early years including take up levels, where places were being commissioned and plans for two-year-olds and that these be included within the report on Children's Centres that is planned for the January meeting of the Panel.
5. That an early years provider from both the east and the west of the borough be invited to come along to the Panel meeting in January to give their perspective on developments.
6. That it be noted that that £4 million had been invested in John Loughborough School as part of the Building Schools for the Future project and recommend that, if the school were to close, that measures should be taken to protect the public money invested in the site.
7. That advice given to young people on careers and further education should be aspirational to give them the best chances and that this should be monitored to improve outcomes for young people. The Council should take a lead role together with local businesses and schools to ensure the best outcomes for young people.
8. That, in respect of Youth Services, the Panel request details of work commissioned and of the planning that had been made for extending the service to younger children and that these be submitted to the March meeting of the Panel, which is already scheduled to have a youth focus.
9. That in future years, the effective scrutiny of budget proposals be assisted by Members being provided with details of variance from previous years budgets.
10. That an update on the budget be requested for the Panel meeting in January.

LC20. WORK PLAN

AGREED:

That the Cabinet Member for Children to invited to attend the Panel meeting on 21 January for Cabinet Member Question Time.

LC21. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

**Cllr Martin Newton
Chair**

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