

**MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY PANEL
MONDAY, 3 FEBRUARY 2014**

Councillors Brabazon, Bull, Christophides, Engert and Newton (Chair)

Co-opted Ms Y Denny (Church representative) and Mr E Reid (Parent
Members: Governor Representative)

CYPS102. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

CYPS103. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

CYPS104. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

CYPS105. DEPUTATIONS/ PETITIONS/ PRESENTATIONS/ QUESTIONS

None.

CYPS106. MINUTES

In response to the matters raised in the minutes, Ms Redfern reported that since the meeting the service had addressed many of the issues raised. Amongst other things, there was now a bi-weekly audit of placements and communication was being improved. Panel Members highlighted the fact that some providers were extremely keen to expand.

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of 11 November 2013 be approved.

CYPS107. PANEL PROJECT ON NURSERIES AND THE TWO-YEAR-OLD FREE EARLY ENTITLEMENT

The Panel welcomed Neeraj Sharma and Clive Grimshaw from London Councils, who provided the Panel with a presentation on the work that they had been undertaking on the two-year-old early free entitlement. The meeting was also attended by Lisa Redfern, Interim Director of Children and Young People's Services; Jon Abbey, Assistant Director for School Improvement and Charlotte Pomery, Head of Joint Commissioning Adults, Children and Voluntary Sector.

Mr Sharma and Mr Grimshaw reported that local authorities had a statutory duty to secure funded early education for 20% of eligible two-year-olds from 1 September 2013. The entitlement was to be extended to reach 40% of eligible

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two-year-olds from September 2014. £755 million will be allocated to authorities in 2014-15 to fund the scheme. The aim of the scheme was to improve outcomes for two-year-olds who had been identified as potentially benefitting from access to high quality early years and childcare provision. However, this was not a new area of provision for some London boroughs, who had been providing free early education for some children since 1998.

Nationally, 130,000 children qualified for the two-year-old offer in September 2013, with an estimated 26,761 (20.5 per cent) of these in London. The high levels of poverty in some London boroughs meant that very high percentages of children within them qualified for the free early education offer in 2013 and 2014. This figure could be as high as 80%. From September 2014, 285,000 children in total would qualify for the two-year-old offer, with an estimated 50,373 (17.6%) children in London.

London boroughs had been allocated £86 million for the offer. This worked out as an average hourly rate of £5.71, assuming all the money was transferred over to the provider. However, this was below the rate that was provided for the pilot projects, which had been £6.00 per hour. The national average rate was £5.09 per hour. No specific funding has been provided to cover the local authority costs of administering the new duty.

Research undertaken by the Daycare Trust on behalf of London Councils showed that the greatest challenge for boroughs was actually fulfilling the 20% target rather than the higher 40% target. This was due to the fact that many were having to start the provision from scratch.

Most child care in England was provided by private companies, although nurseries, sessional childcare and provision for older children was also provided by the public sector and voluntary and independent providers. The majority of places for the three and four-year-old offer had been available through nurseries attached to primary schools. This was especially true of London. However, the two-year-old entitlement would be delivered mainly through the market. There was a smaller voluntary sector in London although this varied from borough to borough and some boroughs had no public sector provision.

Childcare providers in London had the highest costs in England, due to higher wages and rents. In addition, there was less availability of childminders. While there were vacancies in many early years settings in London, these vacancies were not necessarily in the locations where they were needed nor always suitable for two-year-olds. 44% of providers were already operating at maximum capacity.

Funding from government was not considered sufficiently high enough to offer a competitive hourly rate to attract many providers to expand or set up new provision to provide additional places for two-year-olds. London Councils research had found that a rate closer to £8 was required. There were additional costs associated with looking after two-year-olds. It was not possible, for instance, to use the same toys as for three-year-olds. There were also additional costs associated with children with additional needs, such as

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family support, disability, attending conferences, reviews. There was also a smaller proportion of good and outstanding provision in London.

The Panel noted that families from minority ethnic communities were less likely to take up early entitlement places. Parents/carers from such communities were generally less likely to place their children in early years settings. Funding for the scheme was split between revenue and capital. Boroughs were currently funded based on a full participation model, from 2015 this would change to a funding model based on participation levels.

A number of possible solutions had been suggested by London Councils to improve take up and provision of places. These included:

- Moving three-year-olds from Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) providers to schools, thus freeing up space for two-year-olds;
- Assessing all current providers to see whether they could take additional two-year-olds. It was noted that the two-year-old entitlement was new for them as well;
- Supporting providers who needed additional equipment and facilities to take two-year-olds. The Chair commented that many providers were very keen to expand but not necessarily aware of the possibility of capital funding;
- Building a register of available properties;
- Providing free training for childminders to take on additional children; and
- Working with partners.

The Two-Year-Old Entitlement was a priority issue for London Councils and work would be continuing on it, including research and lobbying of the Department. London Councils research had identified the need for a flexible approach to deliver long term improved outcomes for the most disadvantaged two-year-old that also included working with the family. They were of the view that the government should relax the requirement to only provide 15 hours of funded childcare for the most disadvantaged and allow flexibility for an alternative model. Whereby local authorities would instead be allowed to make two offers to parents based on 15 hours funded childcare:

- 10 hours of early education, plus additional home learning and parenting, developing the model trialled by the Royal Borough of Greenwich and in more local authorities in the 2009 offer. Evidence had so far suggested it was the model that delivered the best long term outcomes; and
- 15 hours of early education.

To date, the DfE had rejected any calls for greater flexibility in the programme. There had been dialogue with the ministerial team and lobbying, particularly in

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respect of the proposal by the government to repeal the duty regarding quality in the Children and Families Bill.

The Panel thanked Mr Sharma and Mr Grimshaw for their kind assistance. They noted, anecdotally, according to London Councils, take up of the entitlement was likely to be below the government target of 80 per cent. Challenges in London meant the take up rate was likely to be approximately 50 per cent, although some authorities may achieve higher. London Councils would be undertaking further work on emerging practice to disseminate learning across London.

Panel Members suggested that EU funding might provide an opportunity to increase capital resources available to develop services. There was a perception that there were lots of suitable church halls available but the reality was that it was a real challenge to identify suitable premises and alternative ways of delivering the scheme needed to be explored.

Ms Pomery commented that although work was being undertaken with childminders, many parents in London were not keen to use them. The DfE was nevertheless promoting childminding heavily.

In terms of communication with parents, the Panel highlighted the fact that personalised letters could promote higher levels of response. They were of the view that communication needed to be reviewed to ensure that its effectiveness was maximised. In addition, effective liaison with Primary schools was important in order to encourage children to move onto nursery classes therefore liberating places for two-year-olds in PVI's.

The Panel were also of the view that health visitors could play an important role in promoting the scheme to parents and carers. Of particular note was the fact that local authorities would be taking on commissioning responsibilities for health visitors from 2015 which would provide greater influence over them.

Ms Pomery provided an update on the implementation of the scheme within Haringey. The Council and its partners were strongly committed to delivering it and were seeking to be innovative and creative in approach. There were three pillars of its approach:

- Sufficiency of places. Work was being undertaken with, amongst others, Corporate Property Services and childminders to increase the number and quality of places;
- Access; and
- Quality.

Action was also being taken, together with partners, to improve communication. As part of this, a marketing day was being held. In terms of funding, a report was being made to Cabinet shortly recommending an increase in the hourly rate to £6 per hour. This was possible due to an underspend in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This would be sufficient to fund the increase for the next two years but after this time additional resources would need to be identified.

The Panel noted that there were currently 77 childminders in the borough whose services had been deemed as requiring improvement by OFSTED. The

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Panel were of the view that the status of childminders needed to be improved and their profile increased. This could be done through, for instance, improved training arrangements and the development of links with Children's Centres.

Ms Redfern reported that the Corporate Delivery Unit had been undertaking some work on early years and she agreed to circulate this to the Panel. A need to develop marketing had been identified which it was felt was not currently strategic enough.

The Panel were of the view that average performance would not be sufficient for Haringey, especially in the light of the Haringey 54000 project. The two-year-old entitlement needed to be an absolute priority for the borough. It was noted that there were currently 666 places available within the borough and that 423 had been taken up so far. However, only 13 childminders were so far offering places.

Panel Members suggested a number of possible locations for provision as follows;

- The play building in Finsbury Park, which could possibly be used as part of a tri-borough project;
- The former NSPCC Maya Angelou Centre in Keston Road;
- The Children's Centre next to Downhills Park;
- The former bowling club in Park Road; and
- The former PRC premises in Coppets Road,

The Panel were of the view that the Council needed to be in a position to grab opportunities when they arose and that the knowledge of ward Councillors of their localities could be utilised to identify potential premises.

The Panel noted that the on-line survey had been sent out to in excess of 800 providers so the response rate of 25 was very low. However, it was nevertheless possible to identify some points of significance from the responses. In particular, it was noted that there were providers in the N15 postcode with vacancies as well as other providers in the same post code area who had more than 20 children on their waiting list. The general comments by providers were also of interest.

Ms Pomery commented that providers should not have waiting lists as the provision was only for a year. Work was being undertaken with providers to address this issue.

The Panel were of the view that self-referral had not proven to be effective in allocating places and that it was important that the process was managed. It was suggested that a Freephone number would assist residents who needed advice and information and that this should also be free for people using mobile phones. In addition, it was felt that much could be learnt from the effective and efficient way that school admissions were administered and suggested that this could be the template for good practice.

It was noted that take up for places for three-year-olds in the Tottenham area was comparatively low. In view of the fact that further funding would be dependent on participation levels, it was critical that this issue was addressed.

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The transition process from two-year-old to three-year-old provision was critical.

CYPS108. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evidence that they had received to date, the Panel considered conclusions and recommendations as follows:

- The Panel were of the view that communication could be improved, including:
 - More helpful and attractive letters, with a named contact.
 - A Freephone contact number that was also free from mobile phones.
- The model used by the School Admissions service should be the template for arrangements to allocate places and fill vacancies for the two-year-old early entitlement.
- Mapping should be published which shows levels of take-up, available places and children awaiting placement in each ward. A system of tracking outcomes should also be developed. This could include case studies.
- Health visitors should play an important role in promoting the scheme and helping to increase take up levels by providing information about two-year-old offer to parents during their visits. This should be built into protocols as the local authority will be taking over responsibility for commissioning the Health Visiting Service from 2015 and there is an aspiration for a return to a Universal Offer.
- The Panel emphasised the need for services to liaise closely with people who have local knowledge. This is particularly useful in helping to identify potential sites for provision. In addition, a call for suggestions for sites might assist in identifying sites with potential.
- Consideration needs to be given to the transition process to provision for three-year-olds with a view to identifying how available funding streams can be most effectively exploited.
- Intensive work should be undertaken with providers, particularly where they have expressed an interest in expanding, with a proactive approach adopted.
- All professionals in contact with expectant mothers and mothers with very young children should be encouraged to disseminate information on the two-year-old offer. "Playground champions" could also be identified to promote the scheme to parents and carers who might be entitled.
- The Panel endorses London Councils proposal that flexibility should be built into the scheme so that the hours can be used in innovative ways that maximise outcomes.

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- There are currently a comparatively small number of childminders providing places as part of the entitlement. The Panel is of the view that the status of childminders needs to be enhanced so that they are encouraged to provide places as part of the entitlement and parents are more likely to consider using them. This could be done through, for instance, improved training arrangements and the development of links with Children's Centres. In addition, consideration could be given to forming them into groups/cooperatives. Childminding could also be promoted in Haringey People.

**Clr Martin Newton
Chair**