MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON MONDAY, 18TH DECEMBER, 2017, 7.15 - 8.50 pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: Kirsten Hearn (Chair), Mark Blake, Sarah Elliott, Reg Rice, Luci Davin and Yvonne Denny

49. FILMING AT MEETINGS

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

50. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mallett and Morris, and from Usma Naseer.

51. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

53. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

54. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 6 November 2017 were agreed.

55. SCRUTINY OF THE DRAFT 5 YEAR MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2018/19 - 2022/23)

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member and officers to give an overview of the budget proposals for Priority One.

Margaret Denison, interim Director of Children's Services outlined a number of areas where efficiencies were being sought. As an example, referring fewer, more

appropriate cases by working closely with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and better educating staff while maintaining the existing threshold. This would allow more scope for earlier interventions, which were more effective as well as more efficient overall. Examples from elsewhere, including Hertfordshire, were being examined to see how a multidisciplinary approach could be more family friendly, better performing and more cost effective. There was now an opportunity to work with officers and invest in such an approach, and repay the upfront investment over time from the savings generated.

It was noted that the Council faced similar issues to other boroughs in the recruitment and retention of Social Workers, which remained a problem for the Council. Work was underway on improving the proportion of Social Workers that were permanent employees, rather than agency workers, and would continue once the permanent Director of Children's Services took up post.

In response to a question about possible payment-by-results services, the Panel heard that this could be one of a range of options, and there were examples elsewhere, for example in Children and Adolescents' Mental Health Services, where it had worked.

Asked about the £2.8m overspend for the current year, and whether there was a reason the service regularly overspent, the interim Director set out the difficulty in projecting the demand on the service, and that almost all boroughs were overspending on Children's Services, according to responses to a London Councils survey. To help better prepare for the future and manage risk, she advised the best approach would be to predict the cost associated with different interventions required, and then model overall costs depending on the demands anticipated, although she doubted the necessary systems were in place to do this at present. The Panel agreed that the consideration of forecasting and possible zero-based budgeting may be a good scrutiny review for the future, which was welcomed by the interim Director.

Asked about whether the problems of unpredictable demand were exacerbated by austerity, the interim Director set out that the drivers of demand – the failure for parents to meeting children's needs, childhood trauma arising from bereavement or domestic problems, and adult substance abuse or mental health – had certainly not improved in the recent past. The Panel discussed that some of these drivers would have worsened over recent years, and that some Authorities, such as Newham, had taken action in areas indirectly related to Children's Services to help the demand on the service. It was agreed that this would be an interesting area for a future scrutiny project.

Considering the budget proposals titled New Models of Care, the Panel noted that there had been some preparatory work in developing new models, and they were now at the stage of implementation. This included greater internal collaborative work, and the recent Joint Inspection had helped reinforce the message that collaboration was required to deliver a quality service.

In relation to the proposals entitled Early Help and Targeted Intervention and Family Group Conferencing, the Panel welcomed the learning within the service that would

enable children being united with families sooner and a child-centred approach, which would also be more cost effective.

In relation to Family Based Placements, the Panel discussed the contact arrangements for children that had been placed with families outside the borough.

In relation to Care Leavers: Semi-Independent Living, the Panel noted that there was a review of payments made, as part of the redesign of care leavers' support.

In relation to Adoption and Special Guardianship Order Payments, the panel noted the proposals and the application of the refreshed policy.

AGREED

1. There should be a scrutiny project by the relevant scrutiny panel into the effect of poverty and austerity on child protection, including the cost implications

2. The Panel welcome the strategic approach of making investments in the service to realise future savings

3. The Panel welcome the pragmatic approach of bringing services in house, such as the Independent Reviewing Officers, allowing greater control on cost

4. The Panel note there is a continuing interest in seeking partnership arrangements, and agree that should be on a pragmatic basis

5. The Panel welcome efforts to intervene earlier in supporting at-risk children, which may reduce longer term costs

6. The Panel welcome the efforts to chart and manage risk and would want to see this continue

7. The Panel welcome efforts to model risk and forecast potential costs by identifying potential costs of different children-related activity and estimating likely uptake

8. The Panel recommend there be meaningful consultation with staff, users and communities to ensure services are delivered effectively, including where savings are required. The relevant panel should look at models of co-production in the next administration.

56. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Panel discussed the Committee's work programme.

Yvonne Denny requested that there be questions to the Cabinet Member at a future meeting on how the needs of children with Special Educational Needs were being met, given the challenges posed by budget reductions, for example in transport. The Cabinet Member confirmed the appropriate officer would accompany her to the March meeting.

The panel asked that the Scrutiny Officer give an update on the proposed date for the scrutiny work on restorative justice.

The Chair suggested that the Panel's March meeting include a review of its work over the past four years.

Following a Panel Member's request that the Borough Commander attend a future meeting, the Chair suggested that interested members should attend the Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel's session with the Borough Commander.

NOTED.

57. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

58. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted.

CHAIR: Councillor Kirsten Hearn

Signed by Chair ……..

Date ……