

Decisions of the Children, Education & Safeguarding Committee

13 September 2021

Members Present: -

Councillor David Longstaff (Chairman)

Councillor Felix Byers (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor

Pauline Coakley Webb

Councillor Val Duschinsky

Councillor Linda Freedman

Councillor Rohit Grover

Councillor Anne Hutton

Councillor Nagus Narenthira

Councillor Danny Rich

Councillor Julian Teare

Councillor Reuben Thompstone

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Corrections to the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2021:

Amendment to sentence under Item 7, para. 3: 'This policy aims to strengthen the link between the two.'

Amendment to sentence under Item 7, para. 5: 'Councillor Nagus Narenthira, duly seconded and moved the following motion.'

Amendment to sentence under Item 7, para. 9: 'Following the discussion on the proposed motion, Councillor Narenthira and the Committee agreed to the following amendment highlighted.'

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Children, Education & Safeguarding Committee held on 7 June 2021 be approved as a correct record subject to the amendments above.

2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS

None.

3. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS

None.

4. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER (IF ANY)

None.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS (IF ANY)

None.

6. MEMBERS' ITEMS (IF ANY)

None.

7. FAMILY SERVICES QUARTERLY UPDATE

Executive Director for Children's Services, Chris Munday, presented the report.

It was noted that although services had performed well during the pandemic and received a positive outcome from the recent Ofsted focussed visit, there were challenges such as the influx of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in Barnet. Despite such challenges, the Senior Leadership Team continued to improve services to meet children's needs. Members queried what strategies were in place for effective case recording and 'All About Me' plans.

Social Workers continue to maintain good relationships with children and were able to action appropriate support for their needs. Staff workshops have been held to address barriers and ways to improve recordings. There are ongoing projects in relation to improving the systems to promote better recording.

The Director of Children Social Care, Brigitte Jordaan, informed that Life Story work was different to the child's Care Plan. The new format, 'All About Me' assessment and plan was introduced to ensure it was the plan was written from the child's perspective and not that of the social worker. Better ways to store and record life story work is being explored.

The service achieved a break-even budget but to minimise the risk of future overspends, as a result of the pandemic, small reserves have had to be built.

Members raised a question as to the number of children being trafficked and who may be categorised as UASC and whether it had an impact on services. It's not always possible to ascertain an accurate picture on trafficked children who were either in the UK or UASC, as children do not disclose the details of their journey to the UK and it is not possible to report on the details due to its sensitive nature. Where evidence of trafficking is found during assessments, the young person would be referred to the correct organisations.

Members questioned whether a change to the definition of trafficking was needed as children in Barnet, affiliated to gangs, may be subjected to trafficking. It was noted that this area of concern is complex and Family Services has had some success in partnership with the police in disrupting trafficking activity into Barnet

Some data and a report Family Services' approach in relation to children being trafficked would be presented at the next Committee. Members also requested an index of the abbreviations used in reports.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman congratulated the Family Services division on the outcome of the Ofsted Focussed Visit and thanked all the staff in Children's Services for all their hard work.

RESOLVED:

- **That Committee notes and provides comments on the performance information summarised in the report and provided in Appendix 1.**

- **That Committee notes the outcome of the Ofsted Focussed visit and provides comments on the findings published in the letter provided in Appendix 2.**
- **That Committee approves a further recommendation to refer the Ofsted letter on their focused visit to the London Borough of Barnet Family Services to full Council to consider and comment in their role as corporate parents to the Borough's Looked After Children.**

8. FAMILY FRIENDLY UPDATE

In refence to family friendly objectives, the Executive Director for Children's Services recommended the commissioning of the Youth Perception Survey and that the Council stop taking part in the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities and Communities Programme, as it had not generated the improvements required in Barnet.

Members referred to universal credit claims and growing unemployment. Areas of concerns would continue to be addressed by Officers and to support families with benefits whilst driving the Employment Strategy which would alleviate some issues. Meetings with London Councils were held regularly to address key issues such as poverty and universal credit to ensure best practice.

Members commended the results of the Youth Perception Survey that showed increased improvements in services, which was a result of hard work and positive engagement. Members also commended all staff and Head Teachers in schools for their outstanding work.

With the increasing need for mental wellbeing support in children and young people in schools and the community and the concerns arising from the recent child suicides in Barnet, additional funding and resources have been placed into clinical services and organisations like KOOTH. As communities and schools reopen and children reconnect with trusted adults, referrals into Family Services has significantly increased. Detailed work is being completed to understand and respond to these pressures on the system.

Suitable accommodation was in place for Care Leavers. The Director of Children Social Care highlighted that cross partnership working will hopefully lead to the successfully acquisition of an additional 30 housing units by Barnet Homes by the end of year for Care Leavers.

Members requested that unemployment figures and data on those who were moving to zero hours contracts be made available at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

- **That Committee notes the report.**
- **That Committee agrees that Council commissions the independent Youth Perception Survey to be undertaken in November 2021.**
- **That Committee agrees for the Council to stop taking part in the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities and Communities Programme.**

9. VOICE OF THE CHILD REPORT

The report provided an update on the work being done to support children and young people to have a strong voice on issues on climate change and mental health which they have highlighted as their priorities.

Members requested for a visual plan to show how all youth forums such as Youth Parliament, Youth Assembly and London Youth Assembly were linked together and how young people progressed from one to another.

RESOLVED:

- **That Committee notes the impact of the campaigns of the UK Youth Parliament and Youth Ambassadors.**
- **That Committee notes the resilience that young people have shown to adapt to changes with programmes and opportunities by continuing engaging in forums, consultations, coproduction, and engagement activities.**
- **That Committee notes and considers the issues highlighted in 8.2 in wider policy decisions.**

10. ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY PANEL - TO FOLLOW

The Director of Children Social Care highlighted that the annual report comprised of several updates of the work achieved throughout the year.

Members pointed out the high number of foster carers who were over the age of 65. It was noted that there was a shortage of foster carers nationally and older foster carers had a lot of experience, however the priority for Corporate Parenting is to consistently recruit more carers for our children.

The number of care leavers who were UASC, continue to be supported by the Council until they turn 25 or all immigration claims have been fully exhausted and they are set to be deported. An average UASC claim could take up to two and half years. UASCs and Care leavers seeking asylum are able access education and some training but not employment whilst their claim is being processed. They have no access to benefits.

Planned destinations in relation to young people would be fed back at a future meeting.

Adopt London North was beneficial to the children, due to their expertise in family finding and their pan London approach enabled them to commission special guardianship support efficiently during the pandemic, which supported care arrangements that were under considerable strain during the lockdowns.

Reversal of plans for adoption have resulted from delays in court proceedings, but in all cases the changed were in the best interest of the child as the plans changed to permanent placement with their foster carers or returning to their parents where personal circumstances had improved.

Members suggested adding page numbers to the appendices of the annual report for easy navigation.

11. THERAPIES

RESOLVED:

- That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee notes the award of a two-year contract (1st September 2021-31st August 2023) with Whittington Health NHS Trust for the provision of Children's Integrated Therapies.

- Total cost of a two-year contract is £6,611,024. The Local Authority's contribution is £1,167,810 through DSG and BELS core funding.

12. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

That Committee notes the Forward Work Programme 2021-2022.

13. ANY OTHER ITEM(S) THAT THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT (IF ANY)

None.

The meeting finished at 8.35pm