

Decisions of the Children, Education & Safeguarding Committee

17 November 2022

Members Present:-

Councillor Pauline Coakley Webb (Chair)

Councillor Tony Vourou (Vice-Chair)

Councillor David Longstaff

Councillor Giulia Monasterio

Councillor Zahra Beg

Councillor Linda Lusingu

Councillor Joshua Conway

Councillor Matthew Perlberg

Councillor Mark Shooter

Councillor Lucy Wakeley

Apologies for Absence

Councillor Liron Velleman

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee held on 20 October 2022 be approved as a correct record.

2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Councillor Liron Velleman who was substituted for by Councillor Anne Clarke.

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. BARNET YOUTH PARLIAMENT AND YOUTH AMBASSADOR SCHEME 2022

Practice and Learning Manager, Liz Shaw, supporting youth participation in Barnet, introduced the Youth Parliament and Youth Ambassador members who attended the meeting.

Isaac Reuben, a member of Youth Parliament, highlighted issues such as the impact of the cost of living on health and accommodating diversity in schools whilst emphasising the safety of students who identify as LGBTQ and other identities. The availability of gender neutral toilets in schools and training for teachers on minority groups including the use of different pronouns, were some of the priorities highlighted.

Cllr Anne Clarke joined the meeting at 7.10pm

Isaac also talked about campaigning for younger people to be able to register to vote in Barnet, increasing youth participation.

Ania Shah, Chair of the Youth Ambassador Board, focused on supporting students with mental health in schools. Ania Shah highlighted the importance of face to face meetings with teachers and stress levels arising as a result of exams. Another priority was educational school trips being extended to all students and not just a particular groups of students.

Liz Shaw added that the issues raised have also been addressed at the Barnet Children Partnership Board, with Headteachers and other key stakeholders to drum up support.

Members enquired how they could help support the work of young people. It was noted that involvement in the 'My Say Matters' scheme would be very useful in promoting Youth Ambassador and Youth Assembly to reach out to and engage young people.

In addition, school visits from Councillors would prove very effective in helping to raise awareness on the functions of local government and how some of that work tied in with the role of the Councillor.

In response to Member's questions, Ania said that educational trips in relation to apprenticeships and suitable prospective jobs would really help those students who did not wish to go to university.

On the issue of safety, Members enquired about the types of problems faced by young people who identified as LGBTQ. Isaac explained amongst other things, the challenges with school trips and not being allowed to stay in rooms with students of a different gender. Therefore, appropriate consultation was needed with those who had been affected. Ania added that education in schools was needed to allow such issues to be dealt with appropriately, especially as many students were unaware of what to do and needed the courage to speak up.

The Chair recommended and received agreement from the young people about suggesting that Heads of Schools positively encourage Councillors to visit schools and speak about the Role of the Councillor.

Members recommended that role play interviews to meet with potential employers and discuss job opportunities for particular year groups be reintroduced by schools.

The Chief Executive and Director of Education and Learning (BELS), Neil Marlow, suggested being the contact for Members who intended to carry out visits to schools.

The Committee thanked the young people for sharing their issues and priorities.

RESOLVED that the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee note and provide comments on the Barnet Youth Parliament and Youth Ambassador Scheme 2022.

8. SECURE CHILDREN'S HOME FOR LONDON AND PAN-LONDON COMMISSIONING VEHICLE

The Executive Director of Children and Family Services, Chris Munday, presented the report about the development of a new secure children's home provision in partnership with other London local authorities primarily due to the lack of such a unit in London. Committee approval was needed for Barnet to join the partnership with an annual contribution of £20,000.

It was noted that once the provision was opened, an alternative model of fees would be sought over the five year period with a break clause in between that time.

Members highlighted the importance of the London Borough of Barnet having permanent representation at board level and enquired about the allocation of resources given the contribution of other Boroughs with a limited number of places.

It was noted that the Executive Director would continue to lead on operational details of the project to include that Barnet has formal representation on the partnership board. In response to Members questions on current provision, it was noted that specialist provision was available across the country where needed and allocated based on the child's needs.

In some cases, bespoke placements were needed especially for children who needed to be contained physically and emotionally due to trauma triggering a stress reaction, possibly being a danger to themselves and to others.

Each local authority participating in the programme would contribute an equal sum annually to the unit which would cover a wide range of infrastructure costs as well as insurance and audit costs.

Members commended the Executive Director for all the effort and work put into the development of the pan London vehicle.

RESOLVED that the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee:

- 1. Agrees in principle for the London Borough of Barnet to become a member of a not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee, provisionally to be known as the Pan London Vehicle, to:**
 - a. develop and then oversee the running of London's secure children's home provision for a five-year period from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2028, with a breakpoint after three years once the refreshed business case has been developed as well as the service pricing structure, commissioning approach, operating model, practice model and the SCH's location is confirmed. Once the provision has launched, membership will be at a fixed annual cost of £20K (subject to inflation adjustment), unless an alternative model for funding the PLV, that does not require annual subscription, is agreed by members during the development phase and**

- b. collaborate with other PLV members on future joint commissioning programmes.
2. Commits in principle to joint oversight and risk/benefit sharing of the secure children's home provision, through the PLV, for a five-year period to 31st March 2028 (with three-year break point), that includes the build, service development and service commissioning phases, subject to ratification after the revision of the SCH business case, and renewable on a ten yearly cycle thereafter, with breakpoint after five years.
 3. Delegates authority to the Executive Director Children's and Family Services in consultation with the Executive Director of Resources (s151 Officer) and the Council's Monitoring Officer to:
 - a. finalise the legal documents required to set up, join and run the PLV and
 - b. make the final determination on the Council's membership of the PLV, following completion of the revised SCH business case and, if appropriate, enter into all the legal agreements, contracts and other documents on behalf of the Council required to implement and run an aspect of the PLV arrangements once approval has been given by Full Council.
 4. Refers the decision to set up a formal Joint Committee (including agreeing terms of reference and appointment of an elected member to sit on it should it be required) , become a member of the PLV company and to appoint directors to the company and members to the Joint Committee, to Council.

9. FAMILY SERVICES QUARTERLY UPDATE

The Director of Early Help & Children's Social Care, Tina McElligott, presented the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Annual Report.

Higher numbers of contacts to the MASH was noted. This was in part due to an increase in children presenting with anxiety post-pandemic as well as concerns raised by professionals working with young people. The MASH are ensuring children are signposted to appropriate services; The challenge was to support agencies to refer directly to services in the community rather than via MASH and a role has been created to support this.

In response to Members regarding communication links, the Officer explained that many partners have not been office based since the pandemic but this was now improving.

Members enquired about the reduction in contacts which had then increased significantly in April. The Officer said that referrals were seasonal and generally higher before and after school holiday periods. In terms of assessments, assessment timescales have been impacted by the difficulty in recruiting social workers to the Duty and Assessment Teams. When interim staff had to leave before completing assessments, it added to the delay as the assessment had to be started over.

The Director of Social Care, Family Services, Brigitte Jordaan, presented the foster carer arrangements of 2021-2022. With up to date information received, the service could do a detailed assessment of the child's circumstances to ensure they were properly cared for, safeguarded properly and placed with suitable foster carers.

It was noted that the number of compliments exceeding the number of complaints received was valuable information for service delivery. The decrease of formal stage one complaints were dealt with at lower management to resolve problems before they were escalated.

Brigitte Jordaan talked about the Letter from the National Adviser who had visited Barnet to review the experience of care leavers. Considerable time had been spent with carers in relation to the local offer. The feedback received was very encouraging especially in relation to Woodhouse Road which was noticeably a comfortable environment and considered as a safe space for young people. The few recommendations resulting from the visit, were already in place and underway.

It was noted that the Barnet's Housing Protocol would be adopted as a best place example for other local authorities.

Members commended Officers on the compliments and the reduction of complaints.

Tina McElligott highlighted the draft Early Help Strategy which required Committee approval for public consultation.

The strategy has been built on earlier work to deliver place-based services for young people, the model is built on the participation in shaping local delivery in partnership with parents, local communities, schools and GP's.

It was noted that insights about services had been supported through the children's participation and family involvement strategy 'My Say Matters; including feedback from the parent champion network who have undertaken 'mystery shopping' exercises and shared feedback about how services could be improved. There will be focus groups arranged face to face and virtually to engage a wide spectrum of views on the development of the new Early Help Strategy.

RESOLVED that the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee:

- 1. Note and provide comments on the ChAT performance report summarised in this report and Appendix 1.**
- 2. Note and provide comments on the MASH Annual Report to the Barnet Safeguarding Children's Partnership Quality Assurance Group.**
- 3. Note and provide comments on the Private Fostering Annual Report to the Barnet Safeguarding Children's Partnership Quality Assurance Group**
- 4. Approve the Annual Complaints Report**
- 5. Note the letter from the National Care Leaver Advisor and request that the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel to oversee the development and monitoring of actions to be taken.**
- 6. Approve the Early Help strategy for public consultation. The strategy will be brought back to committee for approval in January 2023.**

10. EDUCATION STRATEGIES

Neil Marlow informed the Committee of the updates made to the education strategies including the Schools and Settings Improvement Strategy, which contained provisional achievement data. The complete data and any priorities arising from that such as mental health, would be reported to the next Committee.

Some of the issues discussed at the last Barnet Children's Partnership Board including mental health and examination stress have been added to the strategy as part of school improvement. Close monitoring support has been provided to schools especially to those that were flagged up through Ofsted inspections.

The Director of SEND and Inclusion, Karen Flanagan, provided an outline of the updates made to the SEND and Inclusion Strategy and the SEND Special Educational Places Plan. The local SEND area inspection produced positive outcomes, highlighting the achievements of the service as a result of working in a family friendly way whilst maintaining co-production.

Although considerable work has been put into therapy with partners to improve the local offer, challenges have been mitigated by use of additional funding from the high needs budget.

Wider achievements included the opening of Pavilion school and more Education, Health and Care plans (EHCPs) being issued on time in comparison to other Boroughs.

It was noted that the rates of annual review, which was an issue nationally, required further improvement. Complaints and tribunals were being reviewed to ensure that disputes were being resolved at an earlier stage.

In relation to the SEND Sufficiency plan, the expansion of the existing provision at Oakleigh had taken place as well as the opening of the new secondary Additional Resources Provision (ARP) for SEND to ensure sufficient places of special provision.

Member challenged the performance data in relation to Maths and English. It was noted that Barnet schools remained above the national average in all subjects except in Early Years. The last full set of data was taken from 2019 which may have been impacted as a result of Covid.

Members enquired about the options available to help new starters in relation to communications and those not being able to 'catch up' as a result of being socially distant. It was noted that a vast number of programmes have been commissioned including within Early Years as part of the renaissance project. School practitioners were well aware of the issues and further training was provided by the Council where needed.

In response to Members, it was noted that a lot of work was being put towards developing closer relationships with families to be able to identify issues at an early stage before appeals were made so as to lower the numbers of tribunals.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1. Approve the updated School and Settings Improvement Strategy 2022-2024**
- 2. Note the update reports on the SEND and Inclusion Strategy and Special Educational Places Plan**

11. CHILD CARE SUFFICIENCY - ANNUAL REPORT

The Early Years and Primary Service Manager, Andy Whiting, presented key points from the report emphasising that there were no immediate concerns with regards to childcare sufficiency.

Some places required closer monitoring to identify what was currently in place and whether there were opportunities to increase capacity within settings.

It was noted that factors such as the implications of the cost of living, staffing and change in demographics had to be taken into consideration. The Early Years' service used a comprehensive action plan which was reviewed regularly to ensure that sufficient support was in place.

Additional support provision in speech and language has managed to narrow the gap in Early Years resulting in less delays.

Electronic mapping systems were being implemented in nurseries and schools to allow user friendly and live documents.

The Chair asked about language barriers and how the service dealt with those new to the service in terms of the services on offer. The Officer said that it was about educating partners and working closely with health partners and schools to be able to signpost messages appropriately.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the Barnet Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022 attached to this report as Appendix A.

12. BUSINESS PLANNING

The Head of Finance, Sharon Palma, informed the Committee of the gap in the Council's medium term financial strategy which stood at £10.4 million. Further proposals would be shared following the autumn statement account.

It was noted that that any revenue savings proposals or identified service pressures be delegated to the Executive Director of Children's and Family Services in consultation with the Chair of the Committee.

The Chair reassured the Committee that all decisions taken were in the best interest of the children and young people and that vigorous discussions would be held with the lead officer before recommendations were put forth to the Policy & Resources Committee.

RESOLVED that the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee:

1. Agree that any such revenue savings proposals, income generation options and identified service pressures go forward as recommendations directly to the Policy and Resources Committee on 13th December 2022 and be subject to public consultation and an updated equality impact assessment at a later stage.

2. Agree that any such revenue savings proposals, income generation options and identified service pressures are delegated to the Executive Director in consultation with the Chair of the Committee.

13. CFS BUDGET MONITORING (FORECAST FINANCIAL OUTTURN AT MONTH 6 - SEPTEMBER 2022)

Chris Munday highlighted the small overspend of 0.3% which had been forecasted at month 6, taking into account all reserves.

The budget continued to be monitored closely to maintain budget savings targets.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes:

- 1. The current forecast financial outturn for 2022/23;**
- 2. The projected use of reserves**

14. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Members requested that future agendas be shorter to enable proper consideration of the reports.

The Committee noted the work programme.

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

None.

The meeting finished at 9.05pm