

Decisions of the Children, Education & Safeguarding Committee

7 June 2022

Members Present:-

Councillor Pauline Coakley Webb (Chair)

Councillor Tony Vourou (Vice-Chair)

Councillor David Longstaff

Councillor Zahra Beg

Councillor Giulia Monasterio

Councillor Liron Velleman

Councillor Linda Lusingu

Councillor Matthew Perlberg

Councillor Mark Shooter

Councillor Lucy Wakeley

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Under Educational Standards Update on page 3, Members sought clarification to the sentence, 'It was noted that the overall ranking of Key Stages 4 and 5 placed Barnet in the top 5% of the country.'

Officers confirmed that the sentence was correct adding that in 2019, Barnet came in second in the UK for progress figures.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Children, Education & Safeguarding Committee held on 19 January 2022 be approved as a correct record.

2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Joshua Conway who was substituted for by Councillor Alex Prager.

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)

The Committee noted that details of a written question and response were published and circulated in advance of the meeting.

Verbal responses were given to a supplementary question at the meeting.

6. MEMBERS' ITEMS (IF ANY)

None.

7. UPDATE ON BARNET'S ASYLUM SEEKER CONTINGENCY HOTELS

The Chair welcomed Sean Palmer, Director of Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration Support at the Home Office (HO) and Tina Rea, Operations Director at Clearsprings Ready Homes Ltd. to the meeting.

Mr Palmer thanked Barnet for all the support that was being provided to asylum seekers and refugees in the Borough.

Mr Palmer answered questions from the Committee and Council. With regards to costs incurred by the Council on contingency hotels, a new scheme was being implemented to pay the Council £250 for every asylum seeker placed in accommodation and to direct other Local Authorities in providing housing for asylum seekers. Through the scheme, an additional £3,500 per bed space would be made available for accepted dispersal accommodation.

Informal consultation on accomplishing full dispersal as a commitment to the New burdens doctrine was underway between the Government, Home Office (HO) and other interested parties. The HO had been working closely with Clearsprings to move people out of temporary accommodation in order of priority.

In relation to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), where a Local Authority's child population consisted of over 0.07% asylum seeking children, a higher rate of funding would be made available. Additional children could be referred via the national transfer scheme to be looked after by other Local Authorities.

Mr Palmer apologised for the time taken in processing Asylum claims but reassured the Committee that a lot of work was being done to speed up the process, especially for asylum seeking children with a dedicated asylum case worker team in place.

The Age Assessments process had recently changed due to litigation (R (on the application of BF (Eritrea)) (Respondent) v Secretary of State for the Home Department (Appellant) which ruled in favour of the HO.

Immigration Officers were being trained so as to be able to assess and determine whether one was 18 years of age or over.

The Nationality and Borders Act allowed for a National Age Assessment Board within the HO to enable social workers to conduct such assessments which would be binding on the LA. Any mitigation arising out of that would be the responsibility of the HO. It was noted that costs for assessments and legal challenges would be incurred by the HO. An exceptional cost fund had also been set up which invited LAs to refer additional costs incurred to the HO.

Chris Munday, Executive Director, Children's and Family Services, highlighted that £250 per person was approximately a quarter of what had been spent per person in contingency hotels and as of September 2021, the Council had already disbursed over £600,000. In addition, Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

funding had been set aside for schools to enable support for children coming in at different times of the year.

Mr Palmer explained that £250 was only a contribution towards costs incurred by LAs. The New burdens doctrine would need to be adopted to assess Barnet's situation and going forward, additional costs could be picked up by the Home Office.

Mr Munday said that there was over 300 UASC and over 800 families in hotels with a large influx of people over the years. 25% of Barnet's Looked After Children were UASC and they have been supported substantially by Barnet.

It was noted that all figures including different tariff funding arrangements may not have covered all costs incurred and that some asylum claims may need to be processed through mainstream benefits.

Ms Rea offered ways to ease some of Barnet's burden which included limiting the number of children being enrolled which would otherwise have a negative impact on the class. Certain types of accommodation could also be provided upon request.

Members highlighted that hotels have been at maximum capacity for two years and enquired about an indicative time on when the New burden doctrine would be completed so as to move people out of temporary accommodation.

It was noted that it took an average of 12 weeks from identifying a property to moving in. Procurement requests were continuously being made with LAs in the UK to acquire more dispersal properties. However, procuring social housing or affordable housing had been a challenge.

Mr Palmer accepted that it was unusual for families to remain in hotels for lengthy periods of time which could be due particular needs such as accessibility issues. Mr Palmer offered to look into those cases to help ensure that people were moved on as quickly as possible.

It was noted that funding for costs incurred by the LA would not be backdated.

Members stressed the importance and urgency to alleviate some of the pressures faced by the Council.

The Chair highlighted that the way in which different groups of asylum seeker claims have been dealt with depending on their country of origin, was worrying and could give rise to an equalities issue. The Chair also highlighted the limited facilities for families, enquiring about the longest length of time one was placed in a hotel and whether the disruption to continuity of life during dispersal had been taken into account.

The data on the length of 'stayers' would be provided to the Council after the meeting by Ms Rea.

It was noted that there have been no issues with communication with the availability of translation services and a library of languages. A new online digital service in some hotels also help speed up applications.

It was recommended that the Council participated with the New burdens doctrine analysis and to provide accurate figures to the HO to allow consideration of the impact of cost on the LA. Officers would work with the HO to establish a true baseline for the New burdens doctrine.

Ms Rea added that many communal spaces had reopened after Covid and a range of activities were available to ensure that children and young people were well supported. For the summer holidays, Ms Rea welcomed ideas from the Council as staff at Clearsprings would be happy to engage in activities with young people.

Mr Palmer also offered to assist with the day to day needs as required by the Council.

It was noted that data on the longest length of stay would be fed back to Officers by the Home Office and Clear Springs providing accurate reasons as to why people were accommodated for lengthy periods of time.

The Chair thanked the guests for attending the meeting and their contribution.

RESOLVED:

- **That members note the report**
- **That members take the opportunity to question guest representatives from the Home Office and Clearsprings Ready Homes**

8. CES PRIORITIES OF THE NEW ADMINISTRATION

In response to Members' questions, the Chair addressed some of the new administration's priorities. They included support from staff to ensure that children services reached to an outstanding level of performance. There was a need for sustainable nurseries and schools to function properly. Schools in deficit due to additional costs and budgeting problems, had to be addressed. Another priority was to focus on children who suffered during the pandemic and to support schools in getting them back on track.

Transitional Housing for Care Leavers had been an ongoing problem. Therefore, a bigger push for supported lodgings for Care leavers was needed. Problems with providers and affordable childcare had been noted with residents paying a lot more for childcare in comparison to other countries.

Members suggested identifying suitable locations of current nurseries and 0-19 hubs to increase productivity for Barnet residents and their children.

In relation to the vision for youth services, the Chair spoke about finding ways to provide more services through the Borough or charitable organisations so that all young people could have access to the things they wanted to do in areas which were not easily accessible.

RESOLVED:

- **That Committee requests that the Executive Director for Children and Families develops a programme of work which embeds the aspirations of the new Administration and bring back to the next CES committee for agreement.**

9. SEND INSPECTION, SCHOOLS WHITE PAPER AND SEND GREEN PAPER

Mr Munday talked about the inspection carried out by Ofsted and the CPC on services for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), the outcome of which was very positive. An action plan had been developed to focus on particular issues such as therapies and diagnosis which would be monitored and updates arising out of that would be reported back to a future Committee.

Cllr Longstaff congratulated Officers and the SEND team for all their work as noted in Parliament and for being top five for SEND services in the UK which was a great achievement. The Councillor also thanked all health partners, police and parents for their contribution.

Neil Marlow, Chief Executive and Director of Education and Learning, Barnet Education and Learning Service (BELS) presented the report. The Committee was asked to note the outcome of the inspection and to delegate authority to the Executive Director to develop a Barnet response to the White Paper as well as explore the development of a Local Authority Multi Academy Trust.

One of the key points arising out of the White Paper and Schools Bill had been legally enforceable set of standards for academy trusts and a legal tool for LAs to request that some of their schools join an academy trust. It was noted that the Bill would provide protection and other benefits to schools.

A coordinated response to the White Paper was required to address the controversial decision to enjoin all Barnet schools to multi academy trusts.

One of the implications for Barnet was a minimum length of school week of 32.5 hours. There was the ambition that 90% of children would leave primary school by 2030 with expected standards in Reading, Writing and Maths. A drop in attainment was expected this year due to the loss of learning as a result of the pandemic. Ranking of schools however, remained at the top 10%.

Guidance would be provided to schools to achieve pre-pandemic levels of attendance.

A lot of Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) support was already available in schools and the LA would continue to ensure that the needs of schools in SEMH would be met.

The LA worked well in partnership with schools by demonstrating the benefit of change rather than enforcing it on them. There was the possibility of BELS or the Local Authority starting one or more Multi Academy Trusts to help shape the future with schools by enhancing what was already being provided.

It was noted that the DFE had released a 'Test and Learn' for LAs which allowed the Local Authority to put in an interest as early adopter of the multi academy trust on a trial basis.

Officers suggested raising at the next Directors' briefing that governing bodies and Headteachers start discussions with the LA on the new prospect.

A motion was moved and seconded by the Chair for an additional recommendation to be added as follows:

To delegate the Executive Director to explore options for sharing the expertise in Barnet with DfE officials. Officers should seek to maximise opportunities to pilot or seek grant funding to benefit local schools identified through the White and Green Papers.

The motion was carried.

Schools have been engaged on the implications of the Green Paper. The three key challenges noted were outcomes for children with SEND, navigation of the system where alternative provision was not suitable for families and investment to ensure that the system was delivering value for money for families.

Mainstream schools would be directed to follow the new national standards that would ensure children's needs were met effectively through mainstream provision. A single national formula proposed by the DFE would allow the government to set funding levels.

In terms of mediation, families and councils would be required to engage on disputes prior to appeals, to help reduce the number of tribunals. Parents would also be offered a tailored list of schools by Admissions.

RESOLVED That Committee:

-Notes the outcome of the SEND Local Area inspection by Ofsted and the CQC

-Agrees the Action Plan attached at Appendix A

-Notes the Congratulatory Letter attached at Appendix B from Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

-Notes the contents of the Government's White Paper "Opportunity for all: Strong Schools with great teachers for your child" and potential implications for schools, settings and the Local Authority.

-Delegates to the Executive Director, in consultation with the Committee Chair, the authority to develop a Barnet response to the White Paper in discussion with local schools and settings.

-Agrees to delegate authority to the Executive Director to explore the development of a Local Authority Multi-Academy Trust with schools in Barnet and bring back proposals to a future CES committee.

-Notes the contents of the DfE Green Paper "Right Support, Right Place, Right Time" and the potential implications for schools, settings and the Local Authority.

-Delegates the Executive Director to explore options for sharing the expertise in Barnet with DfE officials. Officers should seek to maximise opportunities to pilot or seek grant funding to benefit local schools identified through the White and Green Papers.

10. FAMILY SERVICES QUARTERLY UPDATE

Mr Munday presented the Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) used as performance indicators.

It was noted that Social Care placements have been challenging due to shortages. However, referral pathways have proven to be successful.

One key issue raised by Members had been around performance in relation to time scale of assessments. Assessments were noted to be of good quality and recruitment would support teams to increase performance.

Low numbers of dental checks for Looked After Children was due to the pandemic as well as older children choosing not to visit a dentist. Many young people comprised of UASC with associated issues such as their age being matched with dental records hence fear of repercussion. Other children who came into Care had never been to a dentist and may have been avoiding checks out of fear. The service continued to ensure registration with dentists and to appoint a trusted person in the young person's life.

Tina McElligott, Director, Children's Social Care explained that that statutory worker assessments should be completed within 45 days from start to finish for a Child in Need. (CIN) Data presented to Committee appeared as though assessments were not completed in time. However, due to complex needs in particular cases, a break might be needed to seek expert professional input into the assessment. It was noted that an assessment would commence as soon as a need had been identified to ensure the child received the support needed.

It was noted that a session on the ChAT might prove useful for Members. Members also requested a mechanism of comparative data.

An Annual Self-Assessment was done each year to show data trends which could be used for scrutiny.

RESOLVED That Committee:

- **Notes and provides comments on the ChAT performance report summarised in this report and provided in Appendix 1**
- **Notes and provides comments on the Competition and Marketing Authority (CMA) report into the Children's Social Care placements market summarised in this report and provided in Appendix 2, and to note and provide comments on our placements sufficiency programme an update on the Greenbank House provision, and the London Accommodation Pathfinder programme secure.**
- **Agrees the revised Special Guardianship Policy, provided in Appendix 4**
- **Agrees the revised Connected Carers Policy, provided in Appendix 5**
- **Notes and provide comments on the Nationals Referral Mechanism report summarised in this report and included in Appendix 6**

11. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that Committee notes the Work Programme.

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

None.

The meeting ended at 8.53pm.