

Minutes of the Children and Education Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee

21 September 2023

Members Present:-

Councillor Giulia Monasterio (Chair)
Councillor Lucy Wakeley (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Anne Hutton	Councillor Woodcock-Velleman
Councillor David Longstaff	Naomi Phillips
Councillor Matthew Perlberg	Tamzin Arora
Councillor Tony Vourou	

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS (IF ANY)

There were no apologies for absence.

3. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER INTERESTS (IF ANY)

None

4. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER (IF ANY)

None

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS (IF ANY)

None

6. MEMBERS' ITEMS (IF ANY)

None

7. FOCUS ON SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND DISABILITY (SEND)

Children's Integrated Therapies Provision

The Executive Director for Children's Services said this meeting will consider a whole range of services in relation to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). There are challenges in regard to provision, assessing need and financial sustainability. Therapies is an area of concern, and the department has been working closely with Barnet Parent Carers Forum.

The Assistant Director Commissioning gave an overview of the report highlighting that the integrated therapies services cover occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech and language to those up to the age of 25, who require statutory, health and SEND support. The Whittington Health NHS Trust took over delivery in 2022 and there has been an improvement in service provision and waiting times. There is a national and shortage of therapists and rise in number of children being issued with an Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

A committee member asked if the dissatisfaction from service users relates to quality or level of service. The Director of SEND and Inclusion said the issues, related to the levels of provision.

A committee member asked if Barnet is learning from similar challenges in other boroughs. The Director of Operations - Whittington Health NHS Trust reported that each borough has a different commissioned service. There is a desire for boroughs across North Central London to work together. Collaborative work is important over the next 12 months to reduce duplication.

A committee member asked about future plans given the expected increased demand and pressures on funding and retaining staff. The Director of SEND & Inclusion said there is a need to deliver the service differently as the current approach is not sustainable, there are real opportunities to look at the service more creatively.

The Director of Operations said the change of service model is important but not about downgrading provision but strengthening the universal offer.

The Executive Director, Children's Services said although there has been additional resource, staffing levels remain a challenge and there is a role for government to manage demand. There is a need to strengthen the ordinarily available offer to avoid needs escalating and reduce the need for an EHCP. Barnet's lead role in the Change Programme Partnership will help to test new ideas.

Chief Executive, BELS said we offer a lot of support and training to promote successful inclusion and SEND provision in schools to ensure teachers and support staff have the resources they need.

A committee member asked if the work on the onset early intervention programmes has been considered. It was reported that non-recurrent funding is being used to upskill school staff, look at other early intervention programmes including some recent work on language support for young children.

A committee member asked about the risk of the rising cost of transport. It was reported that Barnet has one of the lowest per capita head costs, however, there has been an increase in EHCP leading to an additional demand for the service. There is new government guidance, so Barnet needs to update transport policies, councils are being asked to 'consider the cohort more widely' which has potential to increase demand.

In response to a query, it was reported that more work needs to be done on transition from children to adults as the process can be complicated for young people and families. The pilot will provide an opportunity to focus in more depth on transition points.

Committee members congratulated officers leading on this work.

Barnet: Lead LA for the London partnership of the DfE SEND and AP Change Programme.

The Chief Executive of BELS reported that after a competitive process, Barnet has been selected as the London Lead for the Change Programme Partnership. This is an exciting opportunity to change policy which will be beneficial for Barnet and across the country. There will be further clarity from the Department for Education in terms of the detail as the pilot progresses.

The Director of SEND & Inclusion gave an overview of the report and the background to the pilot which is part of the DfEs SEND and alternative provision improvement plan. There is a focus on a three tiered alternative provision to focus on outreach, short term placements intensive support and longer term placements. There will be the introduction of the standardised EHCP template increasing pressure to do something differently to further develop alternative provision, to focus on outreach, short term placements intensive support and longer-term placements. There will be the introduction of the standardised EHCP template this is process, this is generally welcomed by local authorities and families, particularly those who move to other boroughs.

There will be funding attached to the work and the project team will be seeking to ensure the projects are sustainable.

The committee congratulated officers for successfully bidding for the pilot programme.

A committee member asked if there will be a steering group to look at learning across London. It was reported that the Programme will work closely with other regions to facilitate joint learning and looking at impact across the region.

The committee wanted to understand how to undertake further scrutiny on this work. The Executive Director for Children's services reported that this topic will be presented next year, and officers will provide feedback on progress.

A committee member reported that people come to Barnet to access the provision and we need to advise neighbouring boroughs on SEND provision to ease pressure on our services. The Executive Director for Children's services said outcomes from successful projects will be shared.

In response to a query, committee members were informed that Barnet will receive £4.5 million over two years to be used to support the pilot across the four London Boroughs for the new projects and the work will not impact adversely on existing provision.

A committee member said Barnet schools always feel well supported and in response to a query were informed that schools will be contacted in regard to scheduling of pilot themes, with information provided about communications and engagement.

Barnet SEND data analysis

The Director of SEND & Inclusion gave an overview of the report and were informed that the increase in pupils with SEND is disproportionate to the increase in the pupils population.

There are a higher number of SEN pupils in schools and support services are increasingly important to assist schools. There are also a high number of SEN pupils in mainstreams

schools which is indicative of Barnet as an inclusive borough. There are increased number of specialist schools places and a further 135 planned over the next 18 months.

The Chief Executive of BELS said some additional information was requested prior to the meeting. The Committee asked for the faith background of children with SEND. This information is not available but we will provide numbers of pupils with SEND in faith schools at a later date.

A committee member asked how we can reduce tribunals. The Director of SEND & Inclusion said we can resolve a high number before tribunals and want to focus on having better conversations with parents when there are differences. Further work will be needed to improve informal disagreement resolution processes which will be developed with Barnet Parent Carer Forum on this.

A committee member asked about the reduction of SEND support in alternative provision. It was reported there is good provision in Barnet and a range of support to schools. Alternative Provision is one of the themes in the pilot which will provide an opportunity to look at the offer more closely.

Key changes in relation to Area SEND Inspection arrangements and implications.

The Chief Executive of BELS gave an overview of the report highlighting that Barnet received positive feedback from 2022 OFSTED inspection. There is now a new inspection framework. The Department will be preparing and ensure that all systems and are aligned. An inspection is due to take place in 2027.

In response to queries, it was reported that new inspection arrangements are significantly different and will focus not just on compliance but more widely on the voice and experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families as well as strategic planning governance. Leaders in Barnet are ambitious which supports the process.

Resolved: That the committee agreed the recommendations in the report. The committee will be provided with the number of pupils with SEND in faith schools.

8. FAMILY SERVICES QUARTERLY UPDATE

The Executive Director for Children's services reported that in response to a request prior to the meeting, the Annual Complaints report has been circulated.

There has been a whole range of events post pandemic detailed in the reports for which positive feedback has been received. Data shows that Barnet is good at supported independent living and wrap around support due to the hard work of the leaving care team and Barnet Homes.

A committee member queried the reasons for the improvement in assessments completed and child protection conference and what are plans to improve further.

The Director Early Help said the improvement is due to greater stability in the work force and front door of children's services and starting to stabilise. This has had an impact on timeliness.

The committee asked for the data to include benchmark figures to compare London average and statistical neighbours.

The Executive Director of Children's services said they can provide benchmarking data. The committee were asked to note that there will be further investigation into some areas which have not returned to pre-pandemic levels as there are higher contacts and referrals. It was reported there is a 15% increase in the MASH, this was not matched with greater referrals into social care.

A committee member asked about the success of the 'Talk about it' mental health campaign. It was reported that this is a new an on-going campaign and analysis will be undertaken in the future. A video is currently being co-produced with young people as a part of this work. In response to a further question, it was also reported that information on support for young people during exam periods was distributed to every school and displayed in exam halls.

A committee member commented that the effects of lockdown have been completely underestimated and it may take a generation to return to normality. Some children have significant amounts of catching up to do.

A committee member asked about care leavers accommodation and relationship with Barnet Homes. It was reported that the multi-agency housing panel track details from aged 16 and care leavers are assisted to make housing application. New housing is ringfenced when it comes through. There are lots of initiatives to move young people into housing when it is appropriate. Barnet has a good practice joint working protocol.

The committee thanked officers for the events at the summer of fun which they found to be well organised.

Resolved: The committee agreed the recommendations in the report. The department will provide the committee with benchmarking data, specifically for London.

9. CABINET FORWARD PLAN (KEY DECISION SCHEDULE)

The Committee noted the Forward Plan.

10. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

There will be future updates on the work of the Task and Finish Groups.
The Committee noted the work programme

11. ANY ITEM(S) THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT

None

12. MOTION TO EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

None

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

None

The meeting finished at 8.50 pm