

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

15 January 2024

Members Present:-

Councillor Giulia Monasterio (Chair)

Councillor Joshua Conway	Councillor Tony Vourou
Councillor Anne Hutton	Naomi Phillips
Councillor David Longstaff	Tamzin Arora
Councillor Matthew Perlberg	

Also in attendance

Apologies for Absence

Councillor Lucy Wakeley	Raisel Freedman
Councillor Woodcock-Velleman	

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Co-opted Member Nigel Wildish said he was present at the last meeting but this was not recorded in the minutes.

Co-opted Member Anne O'Shea gave her apologies at the last meeting but this was not recorded.

2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS (IF ANY)

Councillor Wakeley, Councillor Woodstock-Velleman, Raisel freedman

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)

6. MEMBERS' ITEMS (IF ANY)

7. SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN IN BARNET

The Chair announced that the exempt reports for the Family Services item will be considered at a separate meeting due to technical issues with accessing the private area on the Modern.Gov App. This was unanimously agreed.

The Strategic Lead for Children's Services gave a brief overview of the safeguarding arrangements in Barnet and the work of the Safeguarding Partnership. This includes statutory membership from the Police, Health and Local Authority and wider involvement from Education and Probation and other local organisations. It was reported that a multiagency team of independent scrutineers had been commissioned to conduct an annual review of the work undertaken.

The Safeguarding Partnership Manager said their role is to support the Partnership produce the statutory annual report and disseminate learning.

The Lead Independent Scrutineer said she leads a team of three independent scrutineers, her role is to drive continuous improvement, make recommendations and provide assurance to partnership on safeguarding.

They also ensure serious safeguarding reviews are undertaken. A recent project looked at funding of the Metropolitan Police and there is concern about the equity and fairness in funding arrangements. Overall, the Lead Scrutineer said the current arrangements are robust, children are safeguarded, and welfare promoted.

The Director of Children's Social Care gave an overview of the role of council in multi-agency partnership working. There are a wide range of arrangements in place including the Multi Agency Partnership HUB (MASH) Practice Forum. The Director also Chairs the Early Help strategic Board and the Domestic Abuse and Violence against Women and Girls Delivery Group.

The Designated Doctor for Children's Safeguarding gave an overview of the role of the designated team. This includes dissemination of the strategy to health colleagues and supporting rapid reviews and safeguarding issues.

The Director of Safeguarding for North Central London Integrated Care Board added that the annual reports reflect the work undertaken over the last year but there is also lots of discussion and constructive challenge within the Partnership.

The Detective Chief Inspector (DCI) reported that the Partnership works well and is well managed. There had been positive outcomes from recent child abuse reviews, spaces were provided for the local authority to have an input in professional development days.

The DCI reported that following a Police Inspection in September 2022, there were causes for concern on reporting children missing. New measures have been put in place to make sure all lines are followed up regarding suspects, additional training for officers on social media investigations. There will be increased staffing from the end of January. They will work at the child abuse assistance desk and child exploitation team.

A committee member asked if there has been an increase in police funding to do additional work. The DCI reported said there additional funding to bid for specific tasks but there is no increased funding for staffing.

A committee member asked if there is an enhanced response to concerns about children at risk. The DCI said queries are passed to the Missing Team earlier than before.

A committee member asked about staffing and specialist skills. The DCI said new staff are bringing additional skills within areas such as county lines. The Uplift will lead to extra capacity to do more work including training on social media.

The Chief Executive of BELS said education is not a statutory safeguarding partner but they work closely with the Partnership, there is a responsibility to keep children safe, provide training for teachers, work in partnership between schools, work with local authority designated officer. It was reported that one school didn't meet safeguarding requirement and BELS worked closely with school which was able to achieve a Good Ofsted rating after support.

A committee member asked about the number of referrals to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) concerning school staff and how it compares to previous years. The Director of Children's Social Care said the LADO produces an annual report which provide details of the how they support agencies where allegations have been made.

The Executive Director of Children's Services said the annual report of the LADO can be circulated to this Committee.

A committee member asked about Child Death Overview Panels detailing unexpected deaths and how figures compare to previous years. The Designated Doctor for Children's Safeguarding said will he didn't have the previous figures to hand, the Barnet statistics had remained similar.

A committee member asked what learning has been ascertained from previous incidents and how effective it has been in preventing more deaths the previous year.

The Executive Director of Children's Services said he reviews the Child Death Overview Panel Annual Report, which covers North Central London. Outcomes from this report will determine what to prioritise in Barnet. The action plan for this year led to the priority of safe sleeping as children were dying of sudden infant death. The Panel previously looked at suicide.

The Safeguarding Partnership Manager said the Child Death Overview Panel lead will attend the Partnership to discuss emerging themes and performance is reported.

A committee member asked how year on year changes are captured to ensure there is a reduction in deaths in a specific area. The Executive Director of Children's Services said they embed systemic change over a period of time. If there were ongoing issues in an area work would continue and would not to be ceased to focus on a different priority.

A committee member said an area of concern within safeguarding is school absences and asked what happens if a child is taken off school role who is responsible for their safeguarding especially if there are ongoing concerns.

The Chief Executive of Education said schools are responsible for attendance and BELS have attendance officers in the education welfare team. when child leaves the school, it is the local authority's responsibility to track that child until they are settled into a new school setting to ensure the learning from other school is captured.

In response to a further question on responsibilities if a parent decides to home educate their child, it was reported that we have an Elective Home Education Officer who will ensure children get a home education.

The Director of Social Care reported that the MASH has a relationship with the Elective Home Education officer and if there are concerns, they will work together to ensure the child is safeguarded at home. There is significant learning around this area.

A committee member asked about the upward trend in the referrals to MASH and if data has been compared locally as well as pre-pandemic. Also, what is the impact on staff capacity.

The Director of Children's Social Care said they are comparing data locally as there has been a shift in the level of referrals since the pandemic. Referrals were 13% lower before the pandemic, fewer referrals during lockdown, partnership working during pandemic was disrupted. Barnet has 7% highest in London volume of referrals but also has a higher child population. Overall, 13% become a referral for the safeguarding service.

The department held webinars with partners to refresh their understanding of thresholds and where to report concerns as a result referral numbers are reducing. A committee member asked the lead scrutineer about what areas across children's services need improvement or updating.

The Lead Scrutineer said the following areas remained a concern; children suffering from neglect due to cost of living and post pandemic impact, signposting children to the correct services, serious youth violence, post pandemic children's mental health, impact of staff shortages such as health visitors, doctors to support children in safeguarding.

A committee member asked how young people are selected for the young people's resident survey. The Strategic Lead in Children's Services said an independent research company uses a representative sample of secondary school children.

A committee member asked how the senior leadership understand the grass roots problems given that there is a lot of work going on across children's services and many branches across the system.

The Executive Director of Children's Services said there is a range of different things they do including looking at data, the three independent scrutineers are looking at areas, it is important to learn lessons from inspectorates, staffing across the system is an issue. They listen to the voice of children and young people, they recently found that children with disability said their experiences were poorer and they felt more isolated. It is important to have a team and partnership willing to have robust debates, which is critical to a safe system. Barnet has an open and transparent approach. We all need to work together to ensure children and young people flourish in Barnet.

A committee member said as the Children and Young People's survey highlighted concerns around knife crime about their top safety concerns, what is being done to help young people feel safe. Also, do they know where to go if they are at risk of attack and intimidation. The DCI reported a recent project was undertaken to reduce crime in Graeme Park which had over fifteen shootings. A targeted approach led to seized drugs, weapons and a large number of arrests. This work was achieved in partnership with local authority.

The Director of Children's Social Care said the Safeguarding Board are asked to complete a strategic Needs Assessment and publish a Serious Violence Strategy developed in collaboration with young people. It will go to Cabinet for agreement and

published by the end of the month. It sets out how the Partnership will prevent serious violence.

A committee member asked why school exclusions has increased by 28% and what work is being undertaken with schools to deal with this. The Chief Executive of Education said they are working with schools to prevent permanent exclusions and tackle disproportionality within exclusion. Rates have gone up nationally as a result of the pandemic as children are finding school environment difficult. Barnet rates are below the national average. Schools work hard to prevent exclusions and have strategies in place to work with families. The council has an exclusion lead in the education welfare team who works with schools directly.

A committee member asked how much information can be shared and how well this is being done.

The Director of Children's Social Care said there are sharing agreements in place in the MASH but problems still remain as there is a complicated network of different organisations whose systems are not compatible.

RESOLVED

The following reports to be circulated to committee members:

Managing Allegations Against Staff in Barnet- Annual Report by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) April 2022-March 2023

North Central London Child Death Overview Panel Annual Report Annual Report 2020-21.

8. CABINET FORWARD PLAN (KEY DECISION SCHEDULE)

Committee members asked for Corporate Parenting Strategy to be considered at a future meeting.

9. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

This was noted by the committee

10. TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATE

Members of the Elective Home Education Task and Finish Group sought clarification that meetings would be held with headteachers and council officers before the review was completed. The Principal Scrutiny Officer confirmed that this would be arranged.

The committee noted the Task and Finish Group updates.

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

None

12. FAMILY SERVICES QUARTERLY UPDATE

The Executive Director of Children's Services gave an overview of the performance data, which sets out range of information and highlights that most services remain stable. There is an issue concerning timeliness of assessments which is low but improving. There is continuous improvement in recruitment in the children's workforce.

A committee member asked about challenges on completing single assessments and if delays cause any risk to children and why has there been delays.

The Director of Children's Social Care said delays were caused by staffing shortages this has now been resolved. Data will fluctuate for a period of time before it stabilises.

A committee member asked about the increases in re-registrations for child protection plans. The Director of Children's Social Care said this is being kept under review to ensure that children are not being removed from safeguarding arrangements too early.

A committee member noted there are 36 additional unaccompanied asylum seeker children coming to Barnet per month and asked if we can we meet this demand.

The Executive Director of Children's Services said we need to care for our children and meet out statutory duties, there is a concern about children coming into care who are discharged from mental health provision.

A committee member asked if the rise in children in care is a national or local trend. The Executive Director of Children's Services said Barnet rates are below the national average. Rise in figures can be caused by isolated local incidents.

The Executive Director of Children's Services said he will look at latest data of numbers of children in care across London and report findings to the Committee.

A Committee Member asked how we are addressing the 18% of looked after children who go missing in placement.

The Director of Children's Social said 20 children went missing 54 times. They are often complex adolescents. Young people in care are reported as missing if they come home late. They have return home interviews, risks assessments, young people are involved in plan. Police will prioritise children at risk of exploitation. There is a regular report to senior leadership teams to ensure there is high level oversight.

RESOLVED

The Committee to be provided with numbers of children in care across London

13. MOTION TO EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

None

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

None

The meeting finished at 9.00 pm